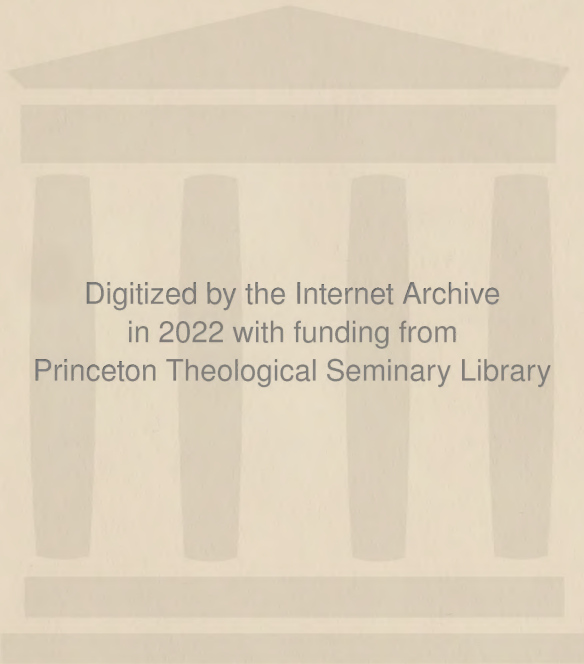
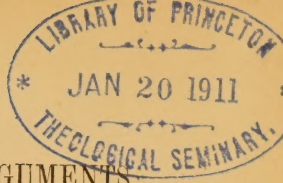


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argument



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CHRISTIAN ERRORS INFIDEL ARGUMENTS:

OR,

James M. Cork

SEVEN DIALOGUES,

by ✓
Alexander Leitch

SUGGESTED BY

THE BURNETT TREATISES, THE EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE

PRIZE ESSAY, AND OTHER APOLOGETICS.

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INTRODUCTION.

IT would appear as if Christianized men were too supine and careless to purge themselves from error, through the sole stimulus of ardent love for pure truth. Hence in the Providence of the Almighty an external irritant is produced, which shall so act upon the lethargy of the Christian body as to enable it to throw off its diseases and corruptions. In the whole history of the Christian community no power has ever risen up in conflict with her, so well calculated to sift her principles and separate the precious from the vile, as infidelity in its various forms. The attack of Unbelief on Christianity will be continued ; and it will from time to time change its form and augment its intensity, till Christians shall by means of this process be cleansed from their impurities, and become one in Christ Jesus. Nor does it seem as if there were any other means so suitable or efficacious for accomplishing this desirable end.

Heathen idolatry has assailed Christianity with brute force, but never contended with her in argument. Persecution with its fires has given the due temper of intense

hardness to the Christian cause ; another process is required to produce fineness and sharpness of edge. The claims of Jupiter, or Brahma, or Baal, to be the object of human worship and obedience, cannot stand a moment's examination before those of Jehovah. The contest between these parties was never much of an intellectual cast. The avowed reason, far less the real reason, for worshipping the gods of heathen mythology and for oppressing even to imprisonment and death the followers of Christ, has never been an expression of intelligent preference for the deities of the classics or the shastres over the God of the Bible. All the evil that Paganism can do to pure Christianity is to attempt to crush it by violence ; and all the good that can come out of this attempt is the development of the virtues of patience and endurance.

The same remarks apply to *Mohammedanism*. The weapon of the false prophet, his Khaliphs, and the Imáms, is not argument or discussion, but war and the sword. When Mohammedanism and Christianity, therefore, come into collision, the question at issue is one simply and directly of life and death—of fealty or of faithlessness to the King of kings and Lord of lords. There is no call or necessity to examine the first principles of truth, or to trace them in their varied ramifications.

Popery, so far as it is a persecuting power, stands in the same relation to Christianity—the Christianity of the Bible, as Mohammedanism or Pagan idolatry. Her

persecutions, being the severest and most protracted, have evoked the grandest displays of the martyr spirit, and shewn that the soul of man, when he loves and possesses the truth, can endure any amount of anguish as well as part with life itself, rather than relax his grasp of the gospel of Christ. It is no doubt also a fact, that the discussions between protestantism and popery have done very much to elucidate and define the truth on those topics which are controverted between the two parties. And every corruption from which the cause of Christianity has been relieved by the Reformation of the sixteenth century, is undoubtedly a weapon wrested from the hand of unbelief. But in relation to infidelity there is a good deal of ground occupied in common both by the adherents and opponents of papal Rome. Both parties accept Christ Jesus as the Saviour of men, and the Holy Scriptures as the word of God. The disputes between them turn very much upon the import of what both adopt as fundamental principles. They are, therefore, apparently but not really, agreed in these fundamental principles; and yet the controversy is seldom fought at the point where it must be ultimately lost or won. As a purely intellectual contest between truth and error, the battle between popery and protestantism has too frequently been one of outworks and skirmishes, rather than one in which a decided victory is gained. If this conflict were differently managed—if either party were more thoroughly intellectual and consistent than they actually are, the strongholds of both would become

more prominent and better marked, the engagement would speedily be found gathering itself around these strongholds, and, the onset being severer, the struggle would be shorter and more decisive. Neither party, however, seems to feel itself called upon to adopt this more searching and resolute mode of action. Consequently, the controversy between romanists and protestants, as actually conducted, fails to develop the finer lineaments and more delicate features of Truth,—to bring out the full proportions and spotless purity and divine majesty of New Testament Christianity. This work must be done; and other means must be used for its accomplishment.

Will not the schisms and divisions that prevail among protestant and evangelical Christians assist in the promotion of this end? Undoubtedly they do assist, and would assist much more effectually, if they were carried on in a more reasonable and Christian-like manner. But what has been said of the popish controversy generally is to a great extent true of protestant disputes. Protestants are not agreed in the grounds or reasons of their protest against the Church of Rome, and their internal schisms are the proof of this disagreement. If they would set themselves to the business of mutual reconciliation—if in a spirit of devout, humble, charitable diligence, Christians would strive to be “of one mind and of one accord”—if when they oppose each other in sentiment on a matter of importance, they felt that one party must be wrong, and that by prayer and effort

they could and ought to “see eye to eye,”—if they would sedulously probe the matter to the bottom, conscientiously suspend their judgment when evidence was imperfect, form their opinion only in the clear sunshine of truth, and hold it in all humbleness and forbearance, then, indeed, would Christianity soon “shake herself from the dust,” and “put on her beautiful garments.” But since Christians have not done so, and do not seem as yet to be much disposed to do so, there are other means in reserve and at hand, that the work may not be left undone. The attacks of infidelity will force Christians to examine their own principles and purge away their errors—a labour which apparently they would never spontaneously undertake.

Infidelity has nothing valuable to maintain, no truth to propagate. Hence when she is thrown on the defensive, or begins to propound some theory, she is sure to be worsted. We now regard Unbelief simply as a power of resistance—a resolute and active determination to repudiate and expose every belief, that cannot be substantiated by sufficient and valid and consistent proof. Christianity comes into direct collision with this power; for the religion of the Bible is essentially aggressive, as it demands the belief and attachment of every man under the heaviest penalties. If Christians might consistently remain satisfied with holding the ground they already occupy, they might often avoid the conflict. But professing as they do a system of positive truth, which, they maintain, is divine in its origin, and in its nature adapted

to mankind, and in its results ineffably blessed, they are under the necessity of constantly acting upon the aggressive as well as the defensive. When Christians have exposed and refuted the various positive theories of infidelity, their work with that same infidelity is less than half-done. You have overthrown *our* system, an unbeliever may be supposed to say, now *your* system must be made good by evidence and argument. But in defending and expounding their own system, Christian contradicts Christian in most momentous and vital points. Infidelity has thus a temporary triumph.

When the Christianity of this age comes before the world displaying her banners, proclaiming her message, and demanding the allegiance of men, her forces are evidently in disorder, and her arguments fragmentary and disjointed. Paganism is too stupid and sensual and besotted to take notice of this disorganization or turn it to her own advantage. If a stray Christian were to come in her path, and provoke her malice in any way, she would, if she could, trample him in the dust, and leave his cause just as it was. In the same manner, Mohammedanism acts towards the religion of the Bible. She is too deeply steeped in fatalism and stained with profligacy to take much interest either in the creeds or conflicts of Christendom ; although, like her elder sister just noticed, her scimitar could draw without reluctance *giaour* blood. Popery has a system of her own to promulgate and defend, and she is too busy or too proud to interfere deeply with the disputes that arise among her

opponents. Christians themselves seem too lethargic to undertake the task of self-reformation.

In this state of matters, infidelity confronts Christianity in her onward progress, challenges every statement which is made, sifts every evidence adduced, confronts Christian with Christian and argument with argument, and being equally regardless of character and consequences, carries on a desultory and remorseless warfare. In the course of these attacks, Christians are brought to feel, through sad experience and discomfiture, every weakness that may be in their defences, every flaw that may be in their weapons, every derangement in their organization, every deficiency in their supplies and every quarrel in their camp. Under the stern teaching of painful trial, they will be constrained to do what they would gladly neglect ;—they must begin to set their affairs in better order. The shafts of infidelity will not cease to fly, nor will they be innocuous—so long as the panoply of the church is incomplete, or a fissure may be seen in any portion of her armour. The scorn and contempt of infidelity cannot be avoided or triumphantly retorted, so long as there is a rent in the garment of the Church, or a stain upon her raiment.

Infidelity is thus, in the hands of God, the most effectual, if not the only means, by which the Church of Christ is to be purged of her more latent errors, as well as reproved for her more obvious faults. It is but *one* work, to expose and correct the mistakes and transgressions of the Christian community, and to repel completely

and satisfactorily the assaults of the most inveterate Unbelief.

The "Christian errors" which the author has had in view in writing the following pages, are not those more gross and open offences against Christian principles, which are palpable to the least reflective, and which are made good use of by infidel orators, although constantly acknowledged and lamented by our apologetic writers. The obvious and very painful fact that to a large extent the truths of the Bible are not reduced to practice by many who profess to believe them, belongs properly to the pulpit, and affords abundance of work to the faithful pastor. This evil, however, is found among the office-bearers as well as members of our churches; and the relaxation of Christian discipline which is the consequence, gives to the unbeliever some considerable advantages in his opposition to the gospel. This matter, though trite, is one of the most vital importance, but it does not fall within the the scope of our present design.

The author has felt a lively sympathy with those who have experienced a degree of dissatisfaction after the perusal of even the ablest treatises in defence of Christianity. He who goes to these treatises for the confirmation of his belief in the gospel is more or less disappointed. He does find much to strengthen his Christian convictions; but neither can he avoid the impression that a thick mist envelops some of the most important points in the argument, and he toils through volume after volume, vainly seeking for that clearness which he is unwilling to regard

as an unwarranted expectation. When this confusion or difficulty is freely confessed by the most skilful advocates of Christianity, and is, at the same time, asserted to be unavoidable and inexplicable, whatever others may have felt, the writer is free to say, that this assertion has appeared to him only to make "confusion worse confounded." His mind would indeed have been shaken, and his Christian faith hopelessly overthrown, if he had not been able to fall back upon the persuasion, that Christianity, as embodying the Truth, must be herself unencumbered with that confusion and those contradictions, and that they belong only to the present views and arguments of her friends and defenders.

Since the writer has been led in the course of his studies to flatter himself that he sees a way through some of this confusion, and a resolution of some contradictions, which weaken the Christian defence, by putting weapons into the hands of the enemy, he feels it to be a duty to lay his thoughts before the public. The most prejudiced cannot but admit it to be at least a possible thing, that the Christian argument, as at present managed, may be perplexed and enfeebled by the admission of one or more erroneous principles, which, finding their development, and bearing their fruits among the Christian people, damage the cause of truth, and give to infidel objections an importance far greater than they intrinsically possess. It is obvious that to whatever extent this possibility may be realised in our actual circumstances, to the same extent the full and unanswerable overthrow of infidelity,

by the clear and impregnable vindication of the principles of the Christian religion, will depend upon a reformation in some of the sentiments of the Christian community.

We have been led to the persuasion that “the *Restoration of Belief*” depends very much upon its *Rectification*, and that the “*conflicts of Faith and Reason*” being most unnatural,—being in fact both unreasonable and irreligious, will only cease when “the *claims of Faith and Reason*” are clearly apprehended. It seems to us as if some needful work were yet to be done at “the Bases of Belief.” When the excavations are more nearly completed, and the foundations more carefully laid, the living temple may rise more rapidly and more securely to its full proportions; for let no one suppose that the work which we have taken in hand is one of mere hair-splitting refinement or wire-drawn distinctions. If we cannot make good our positions, both by the precise and perspicuous statement of principles, and also by making manifest their weighty practical consequences, let our attempt meet with its merited reward in contempt and forgetfulness.

We claim the reader’s indulgence in stating the exact design which we would endeavour to accomplish. It is not our purpose to write a defence of Christianity in which we believe, nor an exposure of Infidelity with which we have no sympathy. But there are some salient points in the argument, not less important than difficult, on which the controversy frequently hinges, while the

lax views of some Christian writers, and the mutual contradictions of all on these very points, give to the skilful opponent no trivial advantage. To these points we solicit a little candid attention. However much we may have grieved over the inconsistencies and confusion which we have noticed in the best defences and expositions of Christian truth, we should never have undertaken the heartless task of uttering that grief, and unfolding its cause, unless we had been led to see something like an outlet from the perplexity, and what appeared to ourselves at least a hopeful mode of terminating the conflict. At the same time, the views which we venture to propound will not be regarded, we trust, by any reader as dogmatic assertions on our part, but simply as suggestions for the consideration of the thoughtful.

Being placed in these circumstances, more than one method of procedure lay ready for selection.

In the first place, an appeal might be made directly to the Word of God. What saith the Scripture, it may be asked, upon those points in the infidel controversy on which Christians are individually confused and mutually at variance? Has the Bible not been often defended with weapons which it neither supplies nor sanctions? Are the advocates of Christianity never untrue to the principles of Christianity herself? As a Christian, we admit fully the validity of this reference. We shrink not from testing the positions which we may have to take up, by their conformity or non-conformity with the testimony of God; we rather court an exegetical appeal to the

statements of Holy Scripture. But this is not our present purpose.

In the second place, the questions at issue might be taken up in a strictly philosophical style. The nature and limits of our knowledge might be speculatively examined and discussed. A treatise on moral science might be composed, and an attempt made to solve some of its hard problems. The views which we have to propose might be vindicated after this fashion; nor do we shun their exposure to this ordeal. If any one will lift them up for discussion to the speculative or metaphysical platform, we are not unwilling to follow. But our present design is to leave abstruse and metaphysical or philosophical speculation in its own lofty sphere, far from the usual haunts of busy men.

The Scriptural argument is waived, because it is irrelevant as used against the infidel. It is vain to refer a man to the affirmations of a book whose very authority he is disputing. And we are unwilling to abandon our two-fold design of inflicting a severer wound on Infidelity by the same process that will promote the union and spiritual prosperity of the Church. Both ends will be to some extent gained, if we succeed in relieving the Christian argument of any of its inconsistencies and contradictions. The strictly speculative mode of treating the subject is also adjourned for the present, though for another reason. A philosophical book is generally regarded by the reading public as beside the mark,—as something with which they have nothing to do. We wish

to be heard by the Christian and infidel commonalty ; and, therefore, throw aside everything that might prevent us from receiving a fair hearing.

The discussions which follow are intended to be chiefly in the form of an *argumentum ad hominem*, addressed to the Christian. The erroneous sentiments assailed in the following pages will sometimes be exploded by showing the practical absurdities to which they inevitably lead ; sometimes they will be manifested to form as valid a plea in the mouth of the infidel as in that of the Christian ; and sometimes they will be shewn to be contradicted by the wiser and better opinions of Christians themselves. In making good these assertions, the title which has been assumed will be justified. When infidels have it in their power to show the practical extravagance of some of our Christian arguments ; to turn others of them against those who use them ; and to set one Christian advocate to combat another, or to neutralize the proof asserted in one page by the proof asserted in another page of the same author, it will not be questioned that “ Christian errors are infidel arguments.”

The propriety of adopting the course now pointed out may be vindicated on the principle, that *Truth is betrayed when defended by weapons which she disowns*. This assertion is not only self-evidently valid, but is confirmed by many facts. He is reckoned not only an unskilful advocate in any cause whatever, but even a disingenuous one, who is not careful to explain the difference in material points between himself and his fellow-advoc-

cates. The want of such explanation indicates an unworthy spirit of partisanship,—a desire to secure a given end without much scruple as to the means of attaining it. We may be allowed to say that there seems to us to be a good deal of this temper manifested in the infidel as well as in the popish controversy. A zeal to crush the adversary is frequently displayed without much ardour to discover or defend the truth. All who come to the same conclusion shake hands heartily together without any inquiry as to the roads they have travelled, although they may contradict each other as vitally as their common opponent contradicts them all. The wiser and abler defenders of Christianity are found, professedly at least, to avoid this mistake. For nothing is more common than the acknowledgment, that the divisions and corruptions of the Christian Church are formidable obstacles to the progress of the gospel, and a storehouse of infidel shafts. The principle is most just; let it be thoroughly and consistently applied. Our discussions are based upon it. Christians have yet to ponder the words ascribed to a heathen of remote antiquity,—“when we teach perverted views in reference to divine things, we hold out occasion for total scepticism.” *

There is another principle which the reader would do well to take along with him. *The difference between what is true and what is erroneous, when stated abstractedly, is often apparently very insignificant.* As the severest struggles have sometimes occurred, and the

* Plutarch.

most decisive victories been achieved, by a handful of troops in a mountain pass, so the great battle of true religion is sometimes most keenly and most vitally contested, over the apparently little difference which forms the ultimate and real distinction between two huge systems of truth and error. Hence the necessity of tracing infidelity to its sources, and pointing out its latent and subtle poison, as it distils among the masses from the lofty heights of a false speculative philosophy. Hence also the necessity of Christians being scrupulously careful in stating the grounds which they assume as the basement of their argument, lest even by an inadvertence they may find themselves to their sore dismay within the enemy's encampment.

SUMMARY OF THE ARGUMENT DEVELOPED IN THE DIALOGUES.

It has been said by a great mind, that confusion is worse than error. Erroneous statements and opinions, in their naked deformity, are generally too hideous to win the regard and confidence of men even in their present depraved condition ; while the manifestation of what is true, in its simple grandeur and pure light, is often too bright and fair to be agreeable to the eye and the heart of man. The great work which a *lover of truth* finds to do is to separate the conglomerate mass of knowledge, or what men call knowledge, into its two component parts, the true and the false. What is false owes all its plausibility and power to its being associated and mingled with what is true. What is true is rendered dim and uncertain and weak by being blended and confounded with the erroneous. The human mind is like a thrashing-floor. The honest inquirer will be constantly using the fan, to separate the chaff from the wheat.

The difficulties which are most frequently and generally felt in the controversy about the evidences of Theism and Christianity are connected with the following points :—the relation between truth and error—the

relation between Knowledge and Faith—the relation between Faith and Responsibility—the distinction between what is *above* reason and what is *opposed* to reason—the distinction between Practical knowledge and Speculative knowledge—the distinction between Certainty and Probability—or, finally, with the Criterion in morals.

The whole of our appeal to the defender of the religion of the Bible may be summed up in the following questions. If you admit or assume a marked and irreconcilable antagonism between truth and error in some matters, why not in every matter? If there be sometimes a dependence of belief or faith upon knowledge, why not always? If a man be held responsible for some of his beliefs, why not for all of them? If there be a clear and valid distinction between what transcends our understanding and what is contrary to it — between a mystery and a contradiction — between ignorance and erroneous knowledge—why is this distinction forgotten, mangled, and disregarded? If there be an obvious and important difference between practical and speculative knowledges, and a similar difference between certainties and probabilities, is it not desirable and necessary distinctly to apprehend the nature of these differences, and consistently to observe them in every question? And, lastly, if there be no criterion whatever in morality independently of the Bible, how can those who are unavoidably ignorant of the Bible be considered accountable beings; and if there be any such criterion, what is it, or where is it to be found?

As to the first of these points, the immutability and self-consistency of truth, and its direct and perpetual opposition to error, no one theoretically or in form questions or denies it. All knowledge and belief, all reasoning and discussion, are avowedly based upon it. The extremest scepticism which would refuse to grant it, would in that very refusal affirm it. A favourite ruse of infidelity is to involve this point in mist and confusion by the ambiguity of words, by insinuating doubts and asking hard questions, and by referring to the actual state of human knowledge in which this fundamental antithesis is so frequently lost sight of. The Christian can triumph only by taking his stand upon the uncompromising opposition between error and truth. But we rarely meet with a stern and unflinching adherence to this principle in all the questions under discussion. If the flippancy and pertness and levity of the professed unbeliever may often be traced to the want of a clear intellectual conviction of the antithesis between truth and error, and the absence of all reverence for Truth, so also may the mental indolence, the blind faith, the indifferentism, latitudinarianism, and formalism, which, like a blight, have, times without number even to the present day, made sad havoc with the garden of the Lord, be more or less directly assigned to a lax apprehension and deficient veneration of the sacredness and majesty of Truth. There are not a few grave and urgent and momentous questions on which Christians are at the present time clearly and constantly contradicting each other, whilst

comparatively few among either of the conflicting parties seem to have any adequate perception of the fact, that Truth lies wounded and bleeding in the fray, far less any suitable compunction for the enormity that is perpetrated.

As respects the second topic, we know not whether it be more frequently affirmed or denied, in express terms, that belief is dependent upon knowledge. At one turn in the controversy the dependence is broadly asserted ; at another turn it is flatly denied. The strongest army which should as constantly and arbitrarily shift its positions, and follow a policy so vacillating, could scarcely expect to cope with the weakest foe. To admit that belief is never dependent upon knowledge, is equivalent to a total and ignominious surrender of our religion. If this dependence be conceded in some cases, common consistency demands that it be maintained in every case. To deny that even in a few instances belief requires to be based upon knowledge, is to lay a foundation for superstition, deep and strong. The severance, as well as the opposition, of knowledge and faith is a very common phenomenon in the Christian community. The seeds of superstition are thus extensively sown ; neither do they die in the soil, and bear no fruit. And every one knows that infidelity is a re-action against superstition.

In reference to the third point, a somewhat similar confusion prevails. Man is asserted to be responsible for his belief. By and bye it appears that this means

responsible for some of his beliefs, but not for all of them. An intelligent and honest hearer of the debate in favour of and against the Bible, cannot help asking, why responsible for some beliefs and not for others? This is a notable distinction. What are the grounds on which it rests, and what the limits to which it reaches? He vainly waits to hear the distinction explained and vindicated. He ventures to ask for information, but receives no reply. And when he presses his inquiry, by signs or silence, though perhaps seldom in words, he is desired not to be troublesome. Here, to say the least, is a case of most palpable confusion, and it occurs in a question of the utmost magnitude. For no man can entirely shake off his sense of responsibility, and every form of infidelity is an attempt to tamper with this deep and sacred feeling.

When infidelity assumes the form of Atheism, it attempts to veil the Sovereign of the Universe from the eye of conscience, and to lull to sleep man's indestructible sense of accountability. Pantheism endeavours to amuse and distract this feeling by its airy speculations and gaudy dreams. Naturalism would stupify and overpower our convictions of being responsible, by bringing us within the range of physical laws of unrestricted universality and adamant stiffness. Spiritualism, by distorting the facts of consciousness and ignoring the statements of the Bible, presents to a man an untrue image of himself, more flattering than the reality. He is captivated with the deceitful beauty of this false repre-

sentation, and in his admiration forgets that he must render an account. Indifferentism and Formalism are fits of temporary insanity; when a man denies or disregards what everybody else acknowledges, and what he himself recognises in his lucid intervals. The assertion of human responsibility, then, and more specifically still, of man's responsibility for his belief, is by far the most critical ground in the whole battle-field where Christianity and Infidelity meet; it is like the Malakoff tower in the Crimea, the precise point where the victory will be lost or won,—the very Thermopylæ of the conflict. Is it possible that just then and there the footing of the Christian soldier should be uncertain, and the tactics of his leader undecided and vacillating? Yet so it is. The responsibility of man for his belief is asserted, retracted, explained, re-asserted, and modified. The believer inflicts upon the unbeliever no wound with this weapon, but it immediately recoils upon himself. If it be maintained that men are to be held responsible while examining, or refusing to examine, the evidences of Christianity, can it be denied that they are responsible while interpreting or misinterpreting its written record? If an individual is accountable for his interpretation of one verse of the Bible, is he not accountable for his interpretation of the verse that follows it? One child is to be blamed for not listening to his father's message, and another exculpated for reversing its meaning!

An indistinct and languid sense of personal responsibility is often the cause of infidelity, and is certainly

promoted by every infidel theory. A restricted and enervated conviction of duty is one fruitful source of the vice and indolence and crime and godlessness under which the world groans. The potent and all-pervading truth, "that whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap," is jostled from its place, its meaning mistified, its brightness dimmed, its force evaded. To accomplish this end every wile of deception is employed, and every resource of wickedness exhausted. This evil is the cardinal stronghold of all irreligion and unrighteousness. The Christian Church, even the bravest and wisest of her heroes, (we shall be blamed for writing thus, but so it appears to our mind for reasons to be assigned,) instead of meeting this foe foot to foot, and disputing with him every inch of ground, are not sufficiently aware of his character, and either allow themselves to be surprised by his superior vigilance, or coming to a parley are entangled in his snares. Few will question the general fact, that in the Christian community the consciousness of individual responsibility is much limited in its sphere and relaxed in its tone; and that many serious blemishes would speedily be removed from the visible body of Christ, if every member thereof were to realise his personal accountability in its integrity, as extending to every thought and word and action of his life, and in all its intensity, as involving his own eternal welfare, the reformation of society, the satisfaction of his Redeemer, and the glory of God. Nor is it unlikely that the confused, depressed, and contracted sense of responsibility which

weakens and divides the Church, has some important connection with the undefined and wavering views entertained respecting it by her teachers.

In regard to the fourth article in our enumeration, there is no distinction more obvious or fundamental than the one between a mystery and a contradiction; and there is none which has perhaps been more frequently acknowledged in words, and in reality disregarded. A mystery is evolved when we have two propositions, both of which we know on independent grounds to be true, but which we are not able to harmonise or reconcile with each other. Here is something above or beyond our reason, but nothing in opposition to it. A proposition which we know to be true, but of which we do not know *how* or *why* it is true, may also be justly regarded as involving a mystery. A contradiction, on the other hand, supposes one proposition to be opposed to another in such a way, that both of them cannot be true. We must, therefore, reject the one or the other. To accept, or profess to believe both, is to be in error,—that is, to think that we know what we don't know. To believe a proposition which involves a mystery, is to know in part, and in part to be in ignorance; that is, to know that we know something, and also to know that we do not know more. For example, there is a mystery connected with animal life. We can affirm with certainty of any animal whose motions we are observing, that it lives and is not dead; but we cannot shew what its life is, or explain the mode and manner of existence. To affirm, however, that

the motion of the blood is a chemical or mechanical motion, is to involve ourselves in a contradiction.

The distinction between a contradiction and a mystery, especially in difficult questions, may be easily lost sight of, but not without detriment to the argument. When one of the parties in a discussion asserts regarding any topic that it is mysterious, the only legitimate way in which the assertion may be met is by denying its mysteriousness, and shewing that it involves a contradiction. In such a case the burden of proof does not lie with him who maintains that what he believes involves something above our reason, but with him who contends that it is contrary to our reason. He who vindicates, for example, his faith in the doctrine of the Trinity, by asserting that it is mysterious, acts entirely on the defensive. But when an opponent affirms that this doctrine is contrary to reason, he is bound to produce his arguments, and the believer is then expected to meet and refute the arguments brought forward.

Now there are several ways in which such a discussion may be mismanaged. The advocate of religion may attempt to explain what cannot be explained, or, by way of having two valid and independent pleas, he may at one time affirm of a certain matter that it is mysterious and beyond our reach, and at another time endeavour to clear away its perplexities. In this latter case, which frequently occurs, the one argument completely neutralises the other. Instances will be pointed out, in which it is first maintained respecting some Christian truth that

it cannot be fathomed by human line, and immediately after the lead is thrown with the intention of sounding its depths. This procedure is clearly illegitimate ; it is confounding error with ignorance, and giving a great advantage to the infidel, one of whose most successful stratagems is to assail the mysteries of our religion, as if they were contradictions. No wonder that he should be successful, when the inconsistency just pointed out so frequently mars the defence of the Christian mysteries.

Again, it is very possible that while there are no contradictions in Christianity itself, there may be several in the arguments of the adherents of Christianity. When the infidel meets with a contradiction in the proofs urged in behalf of the Bible, he will of course make use of it as if it were a contradiction in the religion of the Bible. In such circumstances, the argument in support of Christianity will be sensibly and painfully weak. There is an actual irreconcilable contradiction, not in our religion, but which is the same thing for the time being to those immediately concerned, in the vindication and exposition of our religion. The enemy with keen discernment soon fixes upon this contradiction, and works it frequently and effectually. If the Christian advocate has not penetration enough to see the error, or honesty enough to rectify his argument, he will be reduced to one or other of the following wretched shifts : he will perhaps maintain that what is a contradiction is not a contradiction, in which he will surely be baffled ; or he will avail himself of the enemy's

tactics, and confounding contradictions and mysteries, preach a sermon on humility, since we cannot understand every thing ; or he will resort to the unfailing method of escape from every dilemma, grow eloquent upon the inconsistencies and absurdities of infidelity.

The fifth point to which our attention has been called is the distinction between speculative and practical knowledges. This distinction, which is in everybody's mouth, learned and unlearned, has seldom been carefully examined, or clearly stated, or consistently adhered to. If in religion the difference between speculation and practice be held to be the same as in every other branch of knowledge, as it unquestionably ought to be, then we shall have to consider Christianity as a *science*, and Christianity as an *art*. As the difference between scientific and practical astronomy, for instance, is well marked, so is there in reality a well marked difference, which has yet, however, to be developed, between religion as an art and as a science. One important result of attending to this distinction would be, that as the mechanic, while entirely destitute of philosophical attainments, has a valid, truthful and reasonable knowledge of the art by which he earns his livelihood, so also it may be shewn that the unlettered Christian, while totally unacquainted with the literary and scientific evidences of Christianity, has, notwithstanding, a valid, and truthful, and reasonable belief in the gospel of Christ, through which he is looking for life eternal. If this be conceded we need not be afraid to grant or suppose what is by possibility actually the

fact, that the evidences of Christianity in a *scientific form*, have yet to be accurately stated and adduced. It is our persuasion that the practical argument is at present the only valid, complete and satisfactory argument; and that the scientific argument is imperfect as yet, and, consequently, not fully conclusive. It shall be our object to notice the confusion that is found arising from jumbling together the practical and the scientific in the Christian argument.

The distinction just adverted to, though unambiguous and undoubted in itself, is not what is most commonly intended when religious men contrast speculative or theoretic knowledge with practical knowledge. When it is said that an individual knows the gospel theoretically, but not practically, the fact referred to is this, that the individual does not act upon the knowledge which he has. It appears to us, that this fact, which is worthy of due attention, is improperly described by the language commonly applied to it, especially as this language has, as we have just seen, another meaning of its own, both proper and important. Theoretic or scientific knowledge is knowledge *not to be acted upon*, it is knowledge apart from a practical end; this is its peculiar characteristic, as it is to be distinguished from practical knowledge. Practical knowledge, on the other hand, is knowledge which may, or ought to be acted upon. To suppose that practical knowledge, taken in this sense, *is* always acted upon, is to overlook one of the chief phenomena of human nature, and to confound virtue and vice. And yet this

fundamentally false supposition runs through many an argument.

Here, then, we have more than one source of confusion. There are two important distinctions, both replete with numerous, and varied, and momentous results—namely, the distinction between religion as an art, and religion as a science, or the distinction between a scientific and a practical knowledge of Christianity; and the distinction in moral agents between acting upon our knowledge and not acting upon our knowledge. Now, it has occurred to us, that neither of these two distinctions has been sufficiently developed or fairly used in the arguments in defence of the Bible; and to make the matter worse, that the one has been often confounded with the other.

Some, when the scientific argument breaks down in their management, betake themselves to the practical argument to cover their defeat. But they are ashamed to rest their cause entirely and exclusively on practical ground, which they ought not to be; and they are soon observed slipping back among the mists of speculation. This hurrying to and fro between scientific and practical considerations is repeated as often as the exigencies of the discussion demand. Others, or the same parties at another time, will be found assuming that most men have a theoretic or speculative knowledge of religious truth, and that the great cause and criminality of infidelity lies in this, that these men do not add a practical, to their speculative, knowledge. It is our conviction that most men have, not a speculative, or theoretic, or scientific

knowledge of religious truth (which few, if any, have), but a practical knowledge of it to a greater or less extent. If this practical knowledge were calmly looked at, the evidences of Christianity, in their practical aspect, might be clearly, and satisfactorily, and shortly manifested. The chief cause and the condemning guilt of all infidelity, irreligion and wickedness among men, lies in nothing else but this, that they "do not obey the truth," or, in other words, do not act upon the (practical) knowledge which they possess.

The effect of this confusion upon the argument is somewhat of the following kind:—The Christian having virtually, if not formally, granted that the practical evidences are somehow inferior to the scientific, the infidel can make good his position that the belief of the mass of Christians is also inferior, or, as he affirms, blind and unintelligent. By practical evidences we mean those which are within the reach of every man, independently of learning and recondite argument. We should not like to undertake to show, that the present faith in Christianity held by multitudes is not as a matter of fact unintelligent and blind. But it is a matter of immense moment to show that it is a fact in some cases, and may be, and ought to be, a fact in all cases, that, even amongst the poorest and most illiterate, the gospel can be received as true, honestly and reasonably. This point is seldom made good by our apologists; when it is made good, it does not receive the prominence which is due to it; the argument is often so managed as to render the making

of it good impossible, except by being inconsistent. If this point be made good, we can afford to wait for the proper evolution of the scientific evidences, and freely and without alarm confess our ignorance. As matters at present stand, the taunt that the belief in Christianity is generally mystic, or enthusiastic, or traditional, not intelligent and clear, is seldom fairly met or satisfactorily repelled.

The perplexity is aggravated, when in the same connection the moral character of the infidel becomes a question. If the atheist be considered blameworthy, it can only be on the assumption that he is not acting, or has not acted, according to the knowledge he possesses; that he deals dishonestly with the facts of nature and the facts of consciousness. When any other ground is taken, the infidel can successfully defy all censure. If this ground be taken, he can retort the charge most severely upon the mass of professing Christians, that they are not acting according to *their* knowledge. This ground seems to us to be the only true and sure footing; though it be rarely taken in a decided manner, and as a fundamental position. When this point is waived altogether, or only slightly adverted to, and the value of the practical evidences overlooked, as explained previously, and the defender of our religion plunges deeply into the details of history or the thickets of speculation, however vigorous may be his thrusts against infidelity in its various forms, his defence of the truth is unsatisfactory and weak.

Another point in our enumeration refers to the dis-

tion between certainty and probability. The discussion frequently turns upon the import of these terms, and yet the way in which they are employed baffles every effort to form precise conceptions respecting them. We have different kinds of certainty, and different degrees of certainty, and we have the higher probabilities made equal to certainties. At one time we are told that the conditions of the argument preclude the attainment of certainty. At another time this denial of certainty is transmuted into the assertion of *moral* certainty. At one time the whole stress of the evidence rests upon the distinction between what is certain and what is probable; and at another time this distinction grows gradually less and less, and by and by vanishes away.

It appears to us that there can be in the nature of the case only one kind and one degree of certainty. When we know that a proposition is true, our knowledge is certain. It matters not to what objects the proposition may refer, or by what medium we may come to the knowledge of its truth. Since truth is immutable, whenever we know any truth in the way in which it is proper that that truth should be known, we feel assured and certain respecting it. Our knowledge that coal-gas is inflammable, or that it is wrong to tell a lie, is just as certain as that three and three make six. The certainty in each case may be reached by a different process, and receive a colouring from that process; but it is nevertheless one and the same certainty.

When we know more or less respecting a proposition,

without being able to pronounce it true or erroneous, our knowledge is probable. This admits of course of all variety of degrees, but even between the highest probability and certainty, there is a clear and appreciable difference, which may be noticed frequently in the language of common life, as when we say, it is very highly probable, but not certain.

To admit that we cannot attain certainty, taking the word in an unambiguous and forcible meaning, in morals and religion, seems to us to give up the argument in favour of Christianity altogether. If the truth be of such a nature, or so far removed from us, or so covered up, that our minds cannot clearly perceive it or firmly grasp it—that we cannot legitimately feel fully assured and convinced that we have got hold of the *truth*, where is there any room for argument, or to what tangible or precious result can argument lead? If the whole discussion be, from beginning to end, a comparison of difficulties, a discrimination of this and the other likelihood, a mere weighing of probabilities, and nothing more, we are entangled in the worst form of scepticism; for it were better to reject truth altogether, than, believing in it, concede that man cannot find truth and certainty in religion. On this supposition, indeed, we should easily escape from our painful and unseemly contradictions; for probabilities do not annihilate each other. Moreover, every man's opinion might now be easily admitted to be true to him; for if there be nothing but probabilities, truth is known to none. Thus the harmony and con-

cord which so many desire, that is, the latitudinarianism which treats all opinions with similar deference, will be easily realised. The lowest development of Christianity might be shewn, perhaps, to be a trifle more probable than the highest development of Deism; and on either side there might be found or fancied a graduated scale down to the abyss of atheism and up to the heavenly heights of true piety. But in such a series of barely perceptible steps there would be no place for a real conflict between truth and error; and every man might entertain an equal confidence of being right; for on such a hypothesis error would be indeed partial truth, and no man would be wrong, but men would differ only in possessing smaller and larger measures of knowledge.

To abandon the position, then, that we have certainty in our knowledge of the truth of Christianity, as good a certainty as we have in any other kind of knowledge, is to surrender our stronghold into the enemy's hands. We admit that there is some difficulty in making out this certainty. But the labour of maintaining a position of importance is a bad argument for sounding a retreat. It has been already admitted, that the scientific argument is at present defective, and hence certainty cannot as yet be reached in that direction. The deep consciousness of this has doubtless led many to make an unwary concession. For to many the attainment of certainty seems still more hopeless on the practical side. In practical life, it will be asked, are not men guided by probabilities, and by them alone?

We are not unwilling to allow the whole discussion in which we are engaged to rest upon this one question : Have men, or have they not, certainty, that is, a perfect and unassailable confidence, in the accuracy of the knowledge on which they act in their ordinary practical affairs ?

What certainty, it will be asked with a smile of triumph, has the husbandman that the coming harvest will reimburse him for all his toil and expenditure ? What certainty has the physician that he will cure his patient, or succeed in his profession ? What certainty has the merchant that his merchandise will not be lost in crossing the ocean ? And so on in a thousand cases. None, we reply ; none whatever. Probabilities rather than certainties, enter most largely into the busy affairs of human existence.

But the question is by no means exhausted. The inquiry may be made—Are there *probabilities only* in the knowledge of the practical man ? If his entire stock of knowledge be nothing else but a congeries of conjectures, and guesses, and probabilities, without even one stray certainty to bind them together or preside over them, he is more to be commiserated than the unhappy sailor, who has to navigate his ship over unknown seas, and through changeable stormy weather, without a compass or a chart. If the sailor has but a compass on board his vessel, he can pilot her fearlessly through buffeting waves and against adverse winds ; so also if in our practical knowledge there be even one certainty,

one point which we adopt and hold with unwavering assurance, it may enable us to deal with manifold probabilities, intelligently and safely. One positive undoubted assurance may be to us in practical business, what the compass is to the navigator ; it may serve to direct us unfailingly over the roughest portion of our passage across the sea of life.

Is there, then, no certainty on which men invariably fall back, when they are called to deal with any of the endless probabilities of our social state ? Are there no sage maxims, which are in everybody's mouth at one time or another, and whose certainty forms a striking contrast with the fluctuating nature of the events which it helps us to regulate and control ? Do not prudent men always take the safe side ? In how few cases is there a shadow of a doubt, which is the safe side in steering our way through a sea of perplexities ? There is as little doubt that that side should be chosen. There are few men so dull or stolid as not to *know, with absolute and unconditional certainty*, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred practical emergencies, where the risk lies, and how best to avoid it. Thousands are ruined not by the want of this knowledge, but by not acting upon it.

The application of this principle to Christianity is obvious and most conclusive. Allowing that the Bible has no credentials to sustain its assumption of being the Word of God, except a few feeble probabilities ; still the matter at stake is so momentous, and the time of action

is so short and uncertain; the risk is so absolutely and completely on the side of neglect, and that risk, in all probability to say the least, is so awfully and tremendously great; that not to avoid it,—not to choose the safe side of humble hopeful obedience,—is in the estimation of common prudence nothing better than the madness of infatuated folly.

On this conclusion, forcible and sweeping though it be, a Christian may take his stand with perfect certainty and unabashed assurance; and, having obtained this firm foothold, he may adjourn for further reflection and future decision the unsettled questions in the infidel controversy, taking them up one by one, and reserving his judgment till the full clear light of truth shall beam upon his waiting soul. Having obtained this strong position, he may, if he only be consistent with his own principles, carry conviction of guiltiness to every conscience through the numerous ranks of infidelity.

The last point calling for consideration is the criterion in morality. There are two distinct questions involved in this topic; namely, Is there some standard of morality, a knowledge of which is attainable by man, independently of any assistance from a written revelation? And, if there be, what is it?

A common mode of discussing this topic is to take the last question first, and from the admitted fact that men are not agreed in the principles or rules of morality, to draw the inference that apart from the Bible there is no certain knowledge attainable by man in moral questions.

Although this be a very general and plausible manner of disposing of the matter, it appears to us that a consistent adherence to the principles herein implied would land us in the most complete scepticism.

The inquiry is, Are men, without the Bible, *under an obligation*, and *possessed of capability*, to attain some certain and accurate knowledge of morals, or are they not? To infer what *ought* to be from what *is*, is an obvious paralogism. This is precisely the argument of those, who affirm, that because men disagree about moral principles, therefore there is no obligation nor means of coming to an agreement. It were as reasonable to plead, that since a man has become a rogue, he could not, and cannot, be anything else.

Again, to deny that men have, or can have, any undoubted knowledge as to their duty towards God without the Holy Scriptures, seems to be equivalent to saying that men who are ignorant of Christianity are irresponsible for their conduct. Whoever knows nothing can never be summoned to a reckoning. Therefore, notwithstanding the painful fact, that apart from the Word of God men have not found a criterion in morals, it is an all-important position to maintain, that men might have found, and ought to have found one.

Again, admitting the Bible, inasmuch as it is a revelation from the God of truth, and the Supreme Governor of the universe, to be a criterion in moral and religious questions, yet it is to be noticed that Christians are by no means agreed in their interpretation of this Book,

and also that this Book contains or sanctions truths of two distinct classes. The one class consists of truths which are properly speaking revealed, and which men could not have guessed or discovered without a special revelation of them ; and the other class consists of truths which the Bible assumes or takes for granted as already known or knowable by man.

To us it seems a plain inference, that if discrepancy and contradiction in morals amongst men ignorant of the Bible prove their incompetency to find a standard or attain a true knowledge of ethics to any extent, the contradiction and opposition that prevail among Christians on several momentous questions in morals and religion will equally prove their incompetency to find a standard even with the help of revelation. If, then, there be no standard whatever apart from the Bible, the Bible itself cannot be a standard. Men have misinterpreted the word of God, as well as abused the God-given faculty within them. If the understanding and conscience, unaided by a written revelation, are to be cashiered, because many or most or all men have grievously perverted them, then, because these same faculties have been also grievously perverted in dealing with the word of God when known, they ought to be entirely, and in every form, rejected as invalid. This conclusion, which seems to be unanswerable, if the assumption which we are considering be granted, lands us in the bleak waste of scepticism. If men, then, can know anything certainly and truly by means of the Bible, there is something in morals and

religion which, without the Bible, they can certainly and truly know.

The Bible itself is written throughout on this supposition. It invariably speaks to men as if they knew something, with the purpose of telling them something additional. It could not have been constructed otherwise, so long as it is addressed to intelligent beings.

The inference which we draw is this, that there is a criterion in morals; that it must be found, and will be found, by men; that men will come to agree in moral principles and questions, and will be able accurately to discriminate between the moral truth which the Bible reveals or discovers, and the moral truth which the Bible assumes as knowable by man without special divine authority to sanction it, or express divine teaching to disclose it.

The criterion is certainly not yet found and accepted. Hence every honest and earnest mind will blush for human nature and for the Christian Church, because of our sloth and perversity. Every ingenuous mind will also lend his best aid to elucidate and establish this criterion. This criterion would have been discovered, to some extent at least, long ago, if there had not been so many among Christians, as well as among Jews and Gentiles, who "do not obey the truth."—Rom. ii. 8.

If now, instead of humbly confessing our ignorance of anything worthy of the name of a moral criterion, and earnestly doing our part to find it, we proceed to deny that there can be anything of the sort, and on this prin-

ciple enter the lists with the infidel, we shall soon find ourselves discomfited, or, what is worse, be discomfited without feeling it.

The disadvantages of this mode of conducting the controversy are most conspicuous, when the assault upon Christianity is made from what is assumed to be a standard of moral truth. The only fair and successful way of repelling such an assault is, by shewing that what is assumed to be moral truth is in reality not so. But this may prove a troublesome business; especially when the opponent will demand not only a refutation of his assumed criterion, but also the enunciation and vindication of the true criterion—a demand which, on the face of it, is perfectly fair. It is a much shorter and easier way to laugh and jeer at anything that professes to be “a fixed moral basis;” but this is truly to refute a moderate infidel by means of the principle of extreme scepticism. To foil the Deist by the weapons of Atheism may be successful for a time; but it will be awfully ruinous in the end.

So long as Christians are not agreed in adopting a standard of morality—not agreed as to what those ethical principles are which we may know without the assistance of the Bible, and which the Bible assumes to be known, and not agreed in the principles or truths more strictly speaking revealed—so long they must carry on the infidel controversy at a serious disadvantage. They must convert each other, before they can fully refute the unbeliever. It is vain-glorious, as well as futile,

to attempt to teach the world *the truth*, so far as they have yet themselves to learn the truth. Are not those who have learned the truth *agreed* in holding the truth? For Christians to reason with unbelievers without the assumption of a fixed basis of morality is beating the air. To assume as fixed a basis of morality, while there is no harmony of opinion, or but little, among ourselves, as to what that basis actually is, were simply ridiculous, if the question were less important.

The evils entailed upon the Christian Church in consequence of this state of matters, irrespective of the controversy with infidelity, are numerous and great. For Christians to be perpetually in conflict with each other as to the grounds of their faith, as well as in regard to the exposition of their faith, is to mar their Christian fellowship and retard their spiritual progress, even though they had no enemy to contend with. When no foe is at the gate, the direful consequences of division and schism on matters of moment are obvious and lamentable enough. How much is the evil intensified, and how truly alarming does it become, when notwithstanding the vigorous assault of strong and subtle opponents, our schismatical contradictions and contentions are not only prolonged, but their existence justified on the plea of necessity, and their criminality palliated on the ground of their indirect and secondary advantages!

That Christians have not yet attained to a moral position, outside the Bible, and independent of it, on which as on a common vantage ground they could assail

and overthrow every infidel adversary, secret or avowed, is not the worst feature of the case. It is equally mournful to behold them, with the Bible in their hands, debating and wrangling and contradicting respecting the meaning of the simplest statements, the import of the most precious truths, and the discharge of the most onerous duties. But, to our minds, it is the worst of all, and in a great measure the cause of the evils now specified, that the conscience of the Christian community is content with this condition of its affairs. There is no combined or continued or prayerful effort to effect a change for the better, for there is no belief that such a reformation is practicable. There needs no further evidence to shew that we are a generation of babes in Christ—"Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men."

If an individual is constrained by his circumstances, or contented from his groveling habits, to occupy himself only with "the first principles of the oracles of God," if he will take his station on the lowest practical platform of discussion, if his desire be, not to grow in grace or increase in knowledge, but simply to escape from hell, and *no more*, even to such an one, whose tone of morality is so relaxed and whose spiritual aspirations are so low, it is easy to find some current moral maxim, plain and indisputable to all, which shall expose the flimsiness of infidelity and vindicate his acceptance of, and submission to, the Christian faith. Such practical and popular argu-

ments must be held, and will be shewn, to be as reasonable and valid in their own place, as the most laboured, or recondite or scientific display of evidence is in its place.

If, on the other hand, we would rise to the possession of such evidence, we must be prepared for the toil which its acquisition implies. If the question must be probed to the bottom, and the argument assume a proper scientific form, then we must not fancy, because we are tired, that we have reached the bottom, while yet we have a depth to fathom ; nor flatter ourselves that the symmetry of our argument is complete, when in fact and to all impartial onlookers (as is manifested by prevailing contradictions) it is in a rude and undigested state.

A Believer and an Unbeliever in Christianity having agreed to hold some friendly converse upon the points of difference between them, and having requested a mutual acquaintance to act as Umpire, the following discussions are reported to have taken place. No reader, it is presumed, will suppose that though the names, Origen and Celsus, are given to the disputants, the opinions which they are here represented as holding belonged to the historical personages who bore those names in the second and third centuries. The Umpire is called Theologus, inasmuch as he is expected to know something of "the science of God and divine things."

If the sentiments expressed by Origen in the following dialogues seem to any individuals to be too grossly inconsistent with each other, they are referred to the notes in the margin, which prove that these contradictions have not sprung from the author's heated imagination, but are held and published by some of the best writers of the present day. The reader is likewise requested to notice, that whenever words forming a part of quotations are found printed in italic or capital letters, they are so printed in the books whence the passage is taken.

DIALOGUE I.

TRUTH AND ERROR.

Theologus.—Gentlemen, you both admit the distinction between Truth and Error, I presume?

Origen.—We do, assuredly; for truth is the great object of our search and belief;—truth as opposed and contradicted by error.

Celsus.—So do we; every discussion implies the fixed and immutable nature of this distinction. If there be no truth, there can be no knowledge.

Origen.—Then why have so many from
What is Truth? time immemorial asked, scoffingly, or in jest,
What is truth?

Celsus.—Because it is so difficult to find truth; as is manifest from the contradictions that have so long and so extensively prevailed among mankind on the most important questions.

Origen.—But to admit that there is a distinction between truth and error, is of no avail, unless it be also admitted that we can perceive and appreciate that distinction. If men cannot find the truth, it is the same to them as if there were no truth.

Celsus.—But how are men to find the truth? Amid a multitude of conflicting opinions, how are we to know which is right? It is obviously not enough to find the

truth; it is equally necessary to *know that we have found it*. How then may an individual be reasonably assured that his opinion is true, and that in the face of counter-opinions held by the learned and the wise? The reality of truth is not denied by us; but so long as men cannot grasp it, or so long as they cannot be sure that it is in their possession, it is scarcely anything to them, and we have too much reason to ask, What is truth?

Origen.—The difficulties which are met in the way of finding the truth are entirely in men themselves. He who seeks the truth shall find it; and he who finds it after an honest and diligent search will feel confident, and reasonably so, that he knows it.

Celsus.—You cannot mean to assert, that *whatever* truth a man seeks for, he will be sure to find it. For then any man, with ambition enough, might become not only wiser than Solomon, but actually omniscient.

Origen.—The statement must, of course, be limited to the truth, which it is competent for man to know.

Celsus.—Do you, then, mean the statement to apply to *all the truth* which is within the reach of the human mind? If a person by seeking can find any truth within the sphere of human knowledge, then the dullest hind may soon learn, if he choose, all that man can know; and there will be some consolation for the utter hopelessness of any new discovery in the fact, that none is needed. Of what truth, then, do you affirm, that he who seeks shall find?

Origen.—We make this assertion of *religious* truth.

Celsus.—Mankind have differed as much, if not more, about religion, than about anything else. By *religious truth*, then, you can only mean *your own views about religion*; and your principle amounts to this:—Those who have adopted your views have sought the truth, and those who have not adopted your views have not sought the truth. Such an assertion is as uncharitable as it is unreasonable.

Origen.—Do you, then, deny that in any case a man can find the truth, and be certain that he has found it? If you do, our present discussion and every other is altogether unnecessary, so far as you are concerned; and if you admit that in some instances we can attain confident knowledge of the truth, you are as much bound as I am to answer the question, What truth can we know by searching for it, so as to know that we know it?

Theologus.—Undoubtedly, whoever makes a profession of believing the truth, is bound, in order fully to justify that belief, to answer this question. No creed, atheistic, pantheistic or christian, can be regarded as philosophically¹ or scientifically based, till its supporters have given a satisfactory answer to the inquiry, how, among so many contradictory sentiments, may a man find the truth, and know that he has found it? The following answer is proposed for your consideration:—

If a man diligently and honestly seeks to know the truth on any particular question, it matters not what, he may

¹ See Dialogue 5.

be ignorant in a greater or less degree and for a longer or shorter time, but on that question he will not err.

Origen.—You take a distinction between ignorance and error, I apprehend. These words are often used for each other, please to explain what you mean by the distinction.

Ignorance and
Error.

Theologus.—Knowledge seems to me to be two-fold. When we know the truth, and know that we know it, that is true or normal knowledge. When we do not know the truth, but only think that we know it, that is abnormal or erroneous knowledge, or as it is commonly and shortly called error. Ignorance is likewise two-fold. When we do not know the truth, which is really beyond the reach of our understanding, and know that we do not know it, that is proper or normal ignorance; though it might also be called knowledge. When we do not know the truth, which we might, and ought to know, that is improper or abnormal ignorance, and is rightly classed with erroneous knowledge. To confound a rightful ignorance and an erroneous knowledge as has been often done is a serious mistake.

Celsus.—Your principle, then, will amount to this:—*That if any man fairly and earnestly seeks to know the truth on any topic whatever, he will either know that truth, or know that he does not know it.*

Theologus.—Precisely so.

Origen.—This principle may sound well enough to the ear, but stubborn facts will make sad work with it.

Theologus.—Or rather, it will place facts in their true light. But let us see.

Origen.—How do you apply this principle, or what inference do you draw from it?

Celsus.—Its application is very easily perceived, namely, if it be true, that when infidels oppose Christians this opposition arises, as you affirm, because one of the opposing parties, namely, the infidel, does not seek the truth, then also it follows that when Christian contradicts Christian it is for the same reason, because one of them has not sedulously sought the truth. The conclusion is what has been often maintained,—Christians should convert one another before they undertake to convert the world.

Theologus.—They should do the one and not leave the other undone; both are best done together. Besides, the faults of others will not justify your faults. If the gospel be true, and you refuse to accept of it, you must bear the consequences.

Origen.—The principle which has been stated is liable to many serious objections.

Theologus.—What are they? It is well to consider them separately, though at the same time, it must not be forgotten, that if either the eternal and immutable antithesis between truth and error, or the validity of the human understanding in dealing with that antithesis in its own proper sphere, be denied, the principle itself and the objections urged against it are both equally futile.

Origen.—You are forgetting that “the
 Mathematical and Moral Truth. difference of the evidence on which we receive
 mathematical and religious truth respectively
 is vital.”

Theologus.—It is easy to represent that difference in such a form as to render it fatal to religious truth. How do you state the difference?

Origen.—“Religious truth is received not on demonstrative but on moral evidence, and therefore the notions of religion vary not only in degree but in kind, in different ages and nations, and in the same individuals at different times. Mathematics merely differ by the *more and the less*. He who does not get beyond the first book of Euclid, believes nothing *contrary* to or *inconsistent* with the knowledge of him who has mastered Newton’s ‘*Principia*.’”¹

Celsus.—If this means anything at all, it means that in religion contradictories are true. If contradictory religions may be all true, why may not the contradiction of all religions or infidelity be also true?

Origen.—But you would not reject Christianity with its mass of positive evidence, because of some *insoluble objections*?

Theologus.—What do you mean by an insoluble objection? If it mean evidence proving Christianity to be false, or *disproving* the evidence on which our religion is alleged to rest; if it mean a contra-

¹ A Defence of “The Eclipse of Faith,” by its Author. Second edition. London, 1854. Pp. 97, 98.

diction in Christianity itself, or a contradiction in any part of its evidence, the defender of Christianity is bound to answer the objection or relinquish his position. In other words, we cannot hold to Christianity if it contradict itself, and we must abandon as valid evidence in its favour every argument that is self-inconsistent or false. If those who are so constantly talking of the objections and difficulties connected with the Christian argument, and pleading that even though they be admitted to be insoluble and insurmountable, they do not invalidate the truth of Christianity, refer to the *mysteries*¹ involved in the question, then it is plain, as has been often shewn, that the presence of *mysteries* is no reasonable difficulty or objection, far less one of an insuperable character. The mystery continues, of course, unfathomed, but its existence is no disparagement to truth.

Celsus.—It has always puzzled me to understand how the advocates of Christianity should allow insoluble objections to attach to their own system, when the strongest ground they have ever occupied in assailing systems of unbelief has been alleged insoluble objections.

Origen.—But the objections against Christianity are less in number and less weighty than those against any other system.²

Celsus.—If this be all the superiority which you claim, your cause can attain, at best, but a sorry triumph. The least contradiction is weighty enough. Besides, you yourselves admit, what indeed cannot be denied, that the

¹ See Dialogue 4.

² A Defence, &c., p. 179, 116, &c.

party who professes to defend and inculcate *truth*, should come before the world purged from self-inconsistencies and mutual contradictions. Speaking of my friends, it has been said, "In virtue of their spiritual apparatus, they have arrived, as usual, at very different conclusions on most momentous points; and though it is not of the smallest consequence as long as they are merely attempting to destroy historical Christianity, yet the moment people ask, 'and what *are* we to believe?' it becomes of vital importance."¹ When Christians profess to teach us, then, what we are to believe, the fact that they come to very different conclusions on most momentous points is, on your own admission, of vital importance.

Theologus.—This importance must not be overstrained. The contradiction even of eminent men on a given topic does not prove that the truth on that topic is not to be found, but only that both the disputing parties have not found it. The conflicting sentiments of Christians are objections against some of the present current arguments in favour of Christianity, but not against Christianity itself. We cannot admit, as has been suggested,² that there may be a truce between parties fundamentally opposed, because they are not throughout opposed. So far as parties are agreed, no truce is needed. If one person claims as true what another refuses, truth can never consent to a truce. The collision should "lead us

¹ A Defence, &c., p. 117.

² Theism: by Rev. John Tulloch, D.D. Edinburgh and London, 1855. Burnett Treatise, Second Prize, p. 22.

to ponder more thoroughly the grounds of our own conviction.”¹

Origen.—Suppose, then, that both parties ponder thoroughly the grounds of their convictions, and continue to embrace contradictory opinions, what is to be done? Who is to be judge between them?

Celsus.—When we oppose and deny the truth of Christianity, Who is to judge between you and us?

Origen.—Why, God will judge between you and us for rejecting his own message.

Celsus.—And will not God be judge between Christian and Christian, when it is so obvious amid conflicting interpretations of Scripture, that one party is representing God as saying what in reality he has never spoken?

Theologus.—The retort seems to be fair. To admit that two men, thoroughly honest and diligent in examining an important point, may yet come to antagonistic conclusions, is to abandon the distinction between truth and error, or to deny the validity of the human understanding; that is, to plunge into utter and hopeless scepticism.

Origen.—Yet what more can be demanded or expected of any man than obedience to this precept, which, though it be in the Bible, no infidel will dispute: “Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.”

Celsus.—We have no objections to this maxim, provided only that it be fairly applied. It answers our

¹ Tulloch's Theism, p. 21.

purpose just as well as yours. What we complain of is, that you refuse to give us the benefit of what you claim for yourselves. In contradicting each other two Christians plead, each for himself, that he is fully persuaded in his own mind. In contradicting both of them, I plead that I am fully persuaded in my own mind.

Theologus.—When the text referred to is quoted to justify conflicting sentiments, it is misapplied. Paul gave a clear and unequivocal decision upon the question in dispute (see Rom. xiv. 14, 1 Tim. iv. 4). For each to be fully and honestly persuaded in his own mind, is the proper way for intelligent beings to come to a harmonious conclusion. The text does not teach indifference to truth, but sincerity and charity. As it is frequently quoted, it is equivalent to the infidel adage, “every man’s opinion is true. Every man’s opinion is true to him,” or, in other words, there is no such thing as truth.

Origen.—You will not, however, deny that difference of sentiment is a necessary evil attending the exercise of the right of private judgment? Necessary evils of private judgment.

Celsus.—This is a plea which we have often used. This argument, if good in your defence, is equally good in ours. If *brother Christians*, when they contradict each other on the divinely instituted form of church government, or on the extent of the atonement of Christ, or on the duty of the civil magistrate in reference to religion, or the obligation of signing the total abstinence pledge, and so on,—if they may shake hands heartily at

the close of the discussion and separate amicably and as bosom friends, only lamenting the necessary evils of private judgment, why should not *brother men* do the same, when they differ as to the claims of Christianity?

Theologus.—If this necessary evil involve blameworthiness, then those Christians who are in error when they oppose their brethren are to be blamed, on the same principle that the infidel is to be blamed for rejecting the Divine message. The two parties may not be blameworthy to *the same extent*, but the one is as truly culpable as the other. If this evil referred to has no moral element, but is wholly natural and unavoidable, then the infidel is as innocent as the erring Christian. If both be innocent, there is no evil in error, or the sole author of that evil is God.

Origen.—But you are not giving sufficient prominence and weight to the fact, that the differences, or contradictions, if you will, between one Christian and another are much less momentous, than those between Christians and infidels. Christians, if at all worthy of the name, hold the truth;—can it be said of infidels that they hold the truth at all?

Celsus.—Indeed! *we* know nothing, or all our knowledge is worse than nought!

Theologus.—If a man profess not to believe in truth, or not to know any truth, he is not to be reasoned with; if a man really and in fact knows no truth, or, in other words, if he has no knowledge, or if *all* his knowledge be

erroneous, then it does not appear how he can be regarded as intelligent and responsible in any degree. What do you mean by saying, that the Christian who is worthy of the name holds the truth?

Origen.—The true Christian holds much truth, and the most important truth; and the points on which Christians disagree are of very inferior moment to the points on which they are harmonious.

Celsus.—Admitting the case to be exactly as you now represent it, it is plain that on your own principles the censure so freely lavished on what you call the unbelieving world comes pretty copiously back upon the Christian community. If strict and stern adherence to truth which is always immutable and self-consistent be the duty and honour of every man, the adherents of Christianity on their own confession have much need to learn the very lesson which they are so anxious to inculcate upon unbelievers. Truth, whether it lie on your side or ours, cannot triumph till its disciples disencumber themselves of their contradictions. And the more insignificant you represent your contradictions to be, the easier task it may be to get effectually clear of them. One fact has been often observed, that the differences among Christians swell into huge mountains when Christians are debating with each other, and presently sink into contemptible mole-hills when they take the field against infidelity.

Origen.—It cannot be denied that all sects are more or less Christian.

Celsus.—It is quite as fair to maintain that all religions are more or less true.

Origen.—"The consideration of the moral purpose of life should check that miserable jealousy of speculative or doctrinal differences which is so common ;—differences which are often of words, more than things, and will generally be found, when calmly analysed, either to resolve themselves into ambiguities of language, or to rest in dogmatism on things unknown."¹

Celsus.—This argument is not very consistent with some of your other arguments. It is not consistent with the opinion that "speculation has been the bane of Christianity,"² and that "speculative philosophy is one of the causes of infidelity."³ If speculative inquiries are busied only with "things unknown" or with empty words and not with things at all, it is hard to see how they can have done so much evil. Besides, the author you quote might on his own shewing have been better employed than writing two volumes, which are chiefly speculative. He likewise elsewhere bears decisive testimony to the serious character of the differences that are found among Christians. For example, he says: "By a large number of Christians, even the fundamental truth of man's moral nature is altogether denied. They think they can exalt

¹ Christian Theism. By R. A. Thompson, M.A. London, 1855. Burnett Treatise, First Prize, 2 vols. Vol. 2, p. 385.

² *Ib.*, p. 374.

³ Infidelity. By the Rev. Thomas Pearson. Evangelical Alliance Prize Essay. London, 1853. P. 340, &c.

the grace and sovereignty of God by taking away the free agency of man.”¹ This, of course, is not one of those “doctrinal differences,” a “jealousy” of which is only “miserable.” In writing the passage which you have quoted he surely must have forgotten what he wrote in his first volume thus: “The boast of the age to be guided by practical wisdom and common sense, its contempt for the niceties of speculation, often mean no more than—we will avoid all troublesome thought unless it promise material gain.”²

Origen.—You do not, however, deny the fact that evangelical Christians are all agreed in holding the fundamental truths of the gospel.

Celsus.—The fact is doubtful, for it is by no means patent to the world. You cannot refuse to be judged by your own rule: “By their fruits ye shall know them.” Not to dwell on the acknowledgement that there are many among evangelical Christians, who, to use your own words, have a form of godliness, but deny its power, and are on this account stigmatised as the worst sort of infidels;³ how many controversies have there been, such as that about the extent of the atonement, or those between Calvinists and Arminians, in which each of the opposing parties has strenuously maintained, that the integrity and value of the whole gospel are directly and deeply involved in the issue. If now, however, Christians are at length ashamed of their disputes, and if there be such

¹ Christian Theism, v. 2, p. 393.

² *Ib.*, v. 1, p. 272.

³ See Christian Theism, v. 2, p. 234.

a thing as an actual harmony of Protestant Confessions, let the world behold the spectacle of the various Protestant Churches unanimous in adopting this harmony. Such institutions as the Religious Tract Society, British and Foreign Bible Society, London Missionary Society, and Evangelical Alliance, when looked at in connection with prevailing schisms and sectarianism, confirm our remarks. They are a practical demonstration of the inconsistency of the Christian church. If their Catholic principles be sound, ought they not to be carried much further? If you say that this is impracticable, as the London Missionary Society has found its once boasted fundamental principle to be, then the question arises, why is it impracticable? No answer can be given to this question, except it be, that Christians are nearly as indolent and careless in seeking for the truth, as they affirm that infidels are. As to the Evangelical Alliance, many of your best men have refused to join it, while its creed is too meagre and indefinite to satisfy any church. This alliance is, in fact, a mere stage, on which the drama of union is acted for a few stated hours before the world. But the life of an actor is generally different from his stage-character.

Theologus.—Is there any thing further to be urged against our principle, that he who honestly and diligently seeks the truth on any topic, may be ignorant, but will not err on that topic, or against its application to the contradictions prevalent among Christians, as well as to the absurdities and inconsistencies of infidelity?

The advantages
of sects.

Origen.—The advantages of our divisions, though indirect, have been great and numerous—all these we should lose, and much more, by leaden uniformity. Conflicting sects produce a healthy rivalry.

Celsus.—Have no advantages flowed from the controversy between infidels and Christians? Besides if schism be not “a corruption,” it needs not the plea of these advantages to justify it; and if it be a corruption, these advantages cannot justify it.

Theologus.—The principle under discussion would not by any means, if fairly carried out, conduct men to a leaden uniformity, but would produce, what can be produced in no other conceivable way, a free and intelligent union.

No progress in
Theology.

Origen.—But this principle supposes, that there is “a progress of man in theology”—which is altogether inadmissible.¹

Celsus.—Inadmissible! Christianity *as understood and expounded by men*, has been changeable at least, if not progressive.

Origen.—“In the view of an intelligent and honest mind, the religion of Christ stands as clear of all connection with the corruption of men, and churches, and ages, as when it was first revealed. It retains its purity like Moses in Egypt, or Daniel in Babylon, or the Saviour of the world himself while he mingled with scribes and pharisees, or publicans and sinners.”²

¹ Infidelity, &c., p. 167.

² *Ib.*, p. 394.

Celsus.—This uncontaminated religion of Christ is a mere speculation. Granting that it is *in* the Bible, no one has yet found it. One of your own friends says:—“Christianity is in gradual process of reforming the principles and practices of mankind, and when the sanative operation shall have advanced some several stages beyond its present point, the notions and usages of our day, compared with the commands of Christ *as then understood*, will, no doubt, seem incredibly defective.”¹

Origen.—What then is to be done? “That even the sincere Christian will often be mistaken, and mistaken views have pernicious effects, is no more than may be expected from human fallibility. It needs but little knowledge of human nature, to see that perversions of religious truth will easily have demoralizing effects.”²

Celsus.—If this be the case, it must be admitted that there is “progress of man in theology.” You believe that sincere Christians will some day or other escape from their mistaken and pernicious views. Will that happen without “progress?” If “Christianity has been frequently so much corrupted in its doctrines, morals, and institutions, as to have rendered it somewhat difficult to trace any resemblance between the blotched copy and the fair original,”³ there must have been some progress and improvement already to justify such a statement.

¹ Natural History of Enthusiasm, London, 1830, p. 191.

² Christian Theism, v. 2, p. 392.

³ Infidelity, p. 392.

How is Christianity to be distinguished from its corruptions?

Theologus.—The question now arises, since it is so important that Christianity should not be confounded with its corruptions or made responsible for them, how is Christianity to be distinguished from its corruptions? This question contains the real gist of the controversy, and brings us back to our original ground.

Origen.—"Man can have no infallible guide on any subject. He may expect, as placed here in a state of trial, to learn in morals, as on every subject, from various sources, and by various means. His probation in life depends upon the employment of all the faculties of his nature. He needs all the light, both of reason and of revelation, and will still be liable to error."¹

Celsus.—If, after the due employment of all the faculties of our nature, we are still liable to err,—if, notwithstanding an honest and diligent search for truth in any matter, a man may not only be ignorant, but even err in that matter, this is a scepticism too extravagant for me. If my understanding, do as I may, may still deceive me in one point, it may deceive me in any; it may deceive me in all.

Theologus.—Men are liable to err, as they are to sin, if they choose. But to say that man must sin, or must err, whether he will or not, is to destroy our responsibility and intelligence. Besides, if, not only ignorance, but error be absolutely unavoidable, then contradictions may be stereotyped for ever, and the idea of

¹ Christian Theism, v. 2, p. 408.

progress is, of course, a pure delusion. But if men can avoid error, as our principle implies, and grow in knowledge, progress is possible; and it is also practicable for the upright and earnest to distinguish truth from error in religion, and in other matters.

Origen.—But how is it possible for a man to avoid being in error, when after all “error is partial truth?”¹

Error is partial truth. *Celsus.*—This assertion will not help

your argument, unless it mean that in some way or other error is a portion or fragment of the truth. To suppose, however, that error in any form is found among the elements or constituents of truth in any degree, is to deny the antithesis between truth and error, and to destroy truth altogether. If this were the meaning of the author you quote, he contradicts himself, when he says elsewhere:—“The reason of man, and his faculty of language, are gifts derived from the Creator with his being; and the knowledge which they are able to convey, however imperfect and inadequate, is true as far as it can go, and is such as He intends us to attain.”²

Theologus.—This last quotation is a very fair enunciation of the principle under discussion. If the statement that *error is partial truth* mean, that erroneous knowledge and true knowledge may be found in the same individual mind, or that it is inaccurate to represent a part of the truth as equivalent to the whole of the truth, the statement is unquestionably correct, although we

¹ Christian Theism, v. 1, p. 372.

² *Ib.* p. 338.

cannot admire the manner of expressing it. But with either of these meanings, it cannot palliate or excuse both parties in a controversy, who contradict each other either as to the truth of Christianity, or as to some important point in the evidences, doctrines, or morals of the Bible. We are all along supposing that in every contradiction one of the parties must be in error.

Origen.—But may it not be said, that “arguments often fail to reconcile differences of opinion, because men differ in fundamental principles of judgment, which may not have been ascertained, and which may lie beyond the reach of observation.”¹

Celsus.—If by different principles of judgment, you simply mean diverse principles which are applicable to diverse cases, there is no dispute between us. This, however, cannot be the meaning judging from the language which you use, for such diverse or distinct principles could never account for differences of opinion which cannot be reconciled. Do you really perceive the meaning of your statement? Can you admit it to be possible that the “fundamental principles of judgment” among mankind, that is, not those which are heedlessly assumed to be fundamental, but those which really are so, are contradictory and inconsistent with each other? This is indeed transcendental scepticism. The climax is reached when we are informed that these conflicting principles lie beyond the reach of observation. If man’s nature at its root and core be thus a lie;—what shall we say? Is this

¹ Christian Theism, v. 2, p. 327.

Christian Theism? The same author says, (p. 248), "it cannot need omniscience to guard against error."

Limitation of the
creature.

Origen. — "But God alone is perfect.

The creature in his very nature is limited. This limitation shows itself in man, in the presence of error beside truth in his understanding."¹ "Man's feebleness is apt everywhere not merely to limit, but to spoil his judgments."²

Celsus.—There can be no doubt that in the limitation of our nature is to be found the liability or possibility of erring. But if it be supposed, that because we are creatures we must therefore necessarily fall into error, the validity of the understanding is abandoned. If our rational consciousness err inevitably, involuntarily, and unknowingly even in one instance, how can it be trusted in any instance? In the words of the author you just quoted, we may say, "Man looks abroad with a clear confidence, that what he everywhere reads in the light of his own consciousness is the very truth and meaning which is there, and which he therefore ought to receive. Let this confidence be destroyed, and there remains for him no truth or genuine science that we can imagine."³ This last sentence is emphatic; and it is further obvious, that if this confidence be destroyed in one case, it utterly and entirely perishes. Your argument lands us again, even when judged by your own principles, in the darkest scepticism.

Theologus.—Undoubtedly; when it is affirmed, that the very limitation or narrowness of our minds as created

¹ Theism, p. 340.

² *Ib.* p. 110.

³ *Ib.* p. 58.

beings necessarily entails, not merely ignorance, but in some degree error, it may be asked, are we conscious of any one of these errors when we actually embrace it, or are we not? If we are conscious that we are in error, when we are in error, it is not true that in such a case we really are in error. If again we may be in error necessarily and unconsciously, then such may be our condition for ought that we can tell, in the very instance in which we feel most confidently that we know the truth. Our assurance of knowing the truth is thus irretrievably lost.

Origen.—But while admitting that the facts of God's present administration are conflicting, and the reason of man faltering and tottering, can an express and authoritative revelation not supply the deficiency? ¹

Celsus.—No authority can reconcile facts that are really in conflict. And if man's reason be tottering, even a divine revelation cannot give it strength and stability. This is not my opinion only, but that of your own friends. "There can be no question," says one, "that man is dependent upon his faculties for whatever knowledge he can possess, natural or revealed. It is only through the mental powers that he is able to understand the language of nature, or to find a meaning in revelation. Reason must also be called in to establish the evidences of revelation; and, consequently," mark the words which follow, "the known authority of revealed religion cannot exceed that of the natural powers, and

¹ A Defence, &c., p. 180, and 37.

must be commensurate with the veracity of reason.”¹ Besides, if reason be *tottering* or *faltering*, how can even its *illusions* be *inveterate*? If the influences of Christianity can be neither dissipated nor destroyed by arguments or force,² and if these influences are somehow dependent upon reason, reason must be strong and immovable.

Origen.—All this reasoning, however, is carried on in forgetfulness of a most important principle, that moral and religious truth is not demonstrable, but only *probable*.

Celsus.—Wherein does probable truth differ from other truth? For to a common understanding probable seems a somewhat strange epithet of truth. What is true is more than probable; what is only probable can scarcely be called true.

Theologus.—There is an important distinction between probability and truth, which falls to be considered hereafter.

Origen.—But every person understands the difference between a probable and a demonstrative truth.

Celsus.—What is it then?

Origen.—Take Locke’s statement—“The comparison of the evidence on both sides is the fairest way to search after truth, and the surest not to mistake on which side she is. There is scarce any controversy which is not a full instance of this, and if a man will embrace no opinion but what he can clear from all difficulties and remove all objections, I fear he will have but very narrow thoughts,

¹ Christian Theism, vol. ii. p. 219. ² A Defence, &c. p. 143-144.

and find very little that he shall assent to. What, then, will you say, shall he embrace that for truth which has improbabilities in it that he cannot master? This has a clear answer. In contradicting opinions one must be true, that he cannot doubt; which then shall he take? That which is accompanied with the greatest light and evidence, that which is freest from the grosser absurdities, though our narrow capacities cannot penetrate it on every side.”¹

Celsus.—Nothing surely can be more reasonable than to distinguish between opinions which are to ourselves clear from all difficulties and objections, and those which we do not feel to be so clear. Why should not these two classes of opinions be called by different names? That which has no improbabilities in it which we cannot master, cannot be more than true. To call that true which has such improbabilities is sad confusion. On your own shewing, then, Christianity is *not true*, but only probable.

Theologus.—Besides, it is obviously incorrect to say, that “in contradicting opinions one must be *true*.” For example, if one man says, that the three angles of a triangle are *less* than two right angles, and another man says that they are *more*, these opinions are contradictory, and both of them are wrong. Again, one person says, Episcopacy is the divinely instituted form of Church government, and another says, no, it is Presbytery. These are conflicting opinions, *one* of them must be *wrong*,

¹ A Defence, &c., pp. 217-218.

both cannot be *true*. Both of them, however, *may* be erroneous, for a third party steps forward, and affirms, that Congregationalism is the divinely instituted form of Church government. Of these three contradicting opinions, not one is necessarily true; for it is at least possible, as some maintain, that there is no *divinely* appointed form of Church government at all.

Origen. — “ I find, in reference to Christianity, as in reference to Theism, what appears to me an immense preponderance of evidence of various kinds in favour of its truth ; but both alike, I find, involved in many difficulties, which I acknowledge to be insurmountable, and in many mysteries which I cannot fathom. I believe the conclusions *in spite* of them.” ¹

Celsus. — But, then, you can believe these conclusions only as probable, not as true. Is every opinion in morals and religion involved in insurmountable difficulties ? Is it no more than probable that to tell a lie is wrong ? The author you quote does regard some things in religion as certain and true,—as more than probable. For example, when he says, speaking of a third possibility between the Bible and atheism, “ *This* third possibility—such a god as he describes—is felt by the best instincts of man to be none at all, but an absolute *incredibility*.” ² Again he says, “ One thing is clear, clear as the day, that human nature in general perfectly understands his (the Deist’s) pretensions.” ³ It thus appears, on this author’s shewing, that there are some things clearer and

¹ A Defence, &c., p. 37.

² *Ib.*, p. 63.

³ *Ib.*, p. 67.

more certain, not only in mathematics, but also in morals and religion, than the existence of God and the divine origin of Christianity.

Theologus.—When men express a judgment in matters of opinion or of probability, a real contradiction is never evolved. In matters of probability or of opinion, the proposition is not known or affirmed to be either true or erroneous. Hence men can agree to differ, while their judgments are moving to and fro on this sliding scale of mere opinion. Their differences can be measured by degrees of more and less probability. One man asserts such and such an event is very likely; another says it is not likely at all; and there the business must rest till the fact be developed. It is a totally diverse case, when one affirms, and another denies, the reality of a fact, or the truth of a principle. A man who holds his principles as mere matter of opinion, is generally regarded as an individual of no principle whatever. The denial of one principle implies the affirmation of a counter, or reverse, principle. An undoubted contradiction is also manifested in the affirmation and non-affirmation (that is, the refusal to affirm), a fact which is of much importance to both parties, and within the sphere of their knowledge.

Origen. — The conclusions in natural
Natural Theology. theology are not invalidated by the diverse forms in which the argument is put.

Celsus. — The argument is not only diverse, but the arguments of different advocates are contradictory.

Origen.—That is too sweeping an assertion.

Celsus.—Let us look at the facts. One of your friends says: “The argument for the Being of a God is neither exclusively *à posteriori*, nor exclusively *à priori*, but partakes of both. It is vain to assert an exclusive claim for either argument, since they involve and aid each other.”¹ An exclusive claim has been often made for both these arguments, and made by men whom you highly honour; and now each claim is reprobated, and a good argument is asserted to be found in the combination of the two. I am at a loss to understand how two invalid arguments can form, or be regarded as forming, a sound one;—unless it be somehow in this way, that a man must be content, because he has *two* coats, although neither of them fit his person.

Origen.—Surely you do not assert that Clarke would deny the validity of Paley’s argument, or Paley deny the validity of Clarke’s?

Celsus.—This is not my opinion only. “We consider that these writers (Brown, Brougham, and Chalmers), while rightly repudiating the conclusiveness of *a priori* reasoning in reference to our subject, have failed to set forth, and even to apprehend with clearness and comprehensiveness, the subjective conditions, or, in our previous language, principles, which their *a posteriori* argument at once pre-supposes as its essential basis, and demands in order to its complete and effective validity.”² A contradiction is surely affirmed here. And it becomes all the more emphatic when taken in connection with the

¹ Infidelity, pp. 35, 27.

² Theism, p. 7.

following remarks, in which the essential unity of the argument is asserted. "We deem it unnecessary to enter into any question as to the separate force and value of this department of evidence (moral intuitive evidence.) All such questions are, according to our view, quite irrelevant. For the genuine apprehension of the theistic evidence is not that of a series of separate and independent proofs, but that of a great scheme of argument presenting itself under a variety of aspects." ¹

Origen.—When such eminent and godly men thus differ so seriously, one is almost tempted to conclude that on such topics truth is not to be found by weak erring man.

Celsus.—Ha! that is exactly our conclusion; and it is strongly confirmed by another of your distinguished authors, who says:—"There is no more concurrence among Christians respecting the foundations of natural religion, than among the various systems of unbelief." ² He immediately adds:—"Nothing is more certain to retard the progress of truth, than to recommend it by doubtful evidences, and inconsequent proofs." In such circumstances instead of talking of *retarding* the progress of truth, would it not have been more to his purpose to show its beginning?

Origen.—But after all, the conclusions of natural theology are not invalidated by these contradictory arguments.

Celsus.—At all events, on the shewing of your own advocates truth is damaged. And it is always a suspicious circumstance to find men agreeing to hold a conclusion,

¹ Theism, p. 251.

² Christian Theism, v. 1, p. 7.

while they cannot agree why they hold it ;—like travellers, who during their journey are full of contention and strife, at its termination suddenly and unexpectedly and without apparent cause embracing each other as long-tried faithful friends.

Religion not an affair of logic. *Origen*.—We are on the wrong track, when we suppose that religion is an affair of severe logic and hard argument.

Celsus.—Do you then abandon your favourite fundamental position, that your faith is reasonable ?

Origen.—No, not at all. “Religious life is mainly of an emotional character. That, in human nature, which we have termed religiousness—that which capacitates man for pleasurable communion with the Eternal Spirit—that which craves, in order to its proportional development, a communication of appropriate religious ideas—consists far more largely of sensibility than of power. It is more emphatically responsive to love than to light. Knowing is less its characteristic exercise than feeling. Perfect subjective religion is perfect oneness of will between man and God—and the will, as everybody must admit, is less influenced by the conclusions of the understanding than by the affections of the heart. Not that religiousness has no need of the intellectual faculties—for how but by their aid can we become cognizant of God or of his will ? But such cognizance, although absolutely necessary to religious life, is not the life itself.”¹

Celsus.—While it is admitted, as you have just done,

¹ Bases of Belief. By E. Miall, M.P. London, 1857. pp. 97, 98.

that cognizance, or knowledge of God and of his will lies at the basis of religious life, and so long as the question concerns the nature and validity of that knowledge, it is vain to talk of the mere quantity or amount of sensibility and feeling that may legitimately enter into religiousness. Besides, if knowledge be "absolutely necessary to religious life," then it is plain that knowledge must be regarded as much, and not less, a characteristic exercise of religiousness as feeling. To assert that religiousness is independent of knowledge, is sheer mysticism. To admit this dependence, or, in other words, the reasonableness of faith, is to open up the questions which we have been discussing.

Theologus.—It is necessary to observe, on the statement that "the will is less influenced by the conclusions of the understanding than by the affections of the heart," that the fact may be admitted as it is here stated, without any advantage to the scheme that would sever religion from truth. In morals, what *is* never can prove what *should* be. Will any one deny that the will *ought to be* influenced *as much* at least by the conclusions of the understanding as by the affections of the heart? Hence any religion that is worthy of the name, and that would command the assent of intelligent beings, must *clearly* state *the truth* on which it is founded, and successfully vindicate its validity. Till this is done, emotion and feeling must be suspended; only, however, like waters under restraint, to burst forth more freely in due season.

Origen.—But “religious insight is not to be confounded with intellectual processes.”¹

Celsus.—Will you have the goodness to explain what you mean?

Origen.—“Men may be thoroughly competent to declare to their fellow men what there is of God’s character, of God’s intention, of God’s will, in any special embodiment of them, without being necessarily beyond the reach of correction or criticism in any of the modes of communication they may deem it expedient to adopt. The stammering tongue does not destroy the worth of a kind message. The heart’s love may be truly declared even in broken metaphors. The spirit of a law may be lucidly and impressively set forth, although, in doing it, a man may illustrate his point by a mistaken allusion, or an exploded fact. And the mind of the highest may be unerringly interpreted for us by those whose figures of speech are occasionally confused, and whose chains of argument are not always logically conclusive.”²

Celsus.—All this only amounts to the simple statement, that a man may be right in one point, and wrong in another. And how he can be right on any point, where truth is concerned, without an intellectual process of some sort or another, I am at a loss to perceive. In religious insight or instinct there is an exercise of the understanding, or there is none. If there is none, religion is undiluted enthusiasm. If there be an exercise of the understanding, then there is an intellectual process,

¹ Bases, p. 376, &c.

² *Ib.*, p. 379.

and the above distinction, for all practical purposes, falls to the ground.

Origen.—"The still, small voice of the Creator may be heard within the soul, though formal proofs may be unknown. Deeper than logic, and prior to it, is the truth that God exists."¹

Celsus.—The truth which is deeper than logic, and prior to it, is of course independent of it. Why, then, so much bustle and labour to prove the existence of God?

Theologus.—That there is an *unformal* evidence, or, in other words, practical proof, and that it is both valid and sufficient, has not received the prominence which it deserves.² The relegation or dismissal of religion from the sphere of logic or of truth,—a shift which has been so often resorted to by both parties,—can be regarded as nothing better than a dexterous move to evade a difficulty, or to escape the shame of confessing a failure.

Celsus.—We have no objections whatever to the doctrine, *per se*, that religiousness is mainly a matter of sensibility. As there is no reasoning about affairs of taste and feeling, every man should be left quietly to indulge the dispositions and propensities of his own peculiar constitution. If Christians would only act consistently on this principle, as we should do, if fanatics would let us alone, the acrimony and anger and bitterness of religious controversy would soon be buried in the grave of forgetfulness.

Theologus.—There would be room in the same tomb

¹ Christian Theism, vol. i. pp. 14, 15.

² See Dialogue 5.

for Truth deceased. At the obsequies of Truth, the universe would go into everlasting mourning.

Origen.—It seems almost too much to expect that the present conflict of sentiment on vital doctrines and important duties that prevails in the Christian community should terminate.

Celsus.—It is more likely that Christianity will perish under these very contradictions, when the human race shall rise from the minority of superstition to the manhood of reason.

Theologus.—There is no chance of mankind adopting infidelity, at all events, till the race is in its dotage. But it cannot be doubted that the union of the Christian Church, as described in the New Testament, is an union of sentiment and judgment, as well as of love and affection. This union may allow “endless varieties of administration, and local laws and customs widely differing from each other,” *only* so long as no religious principle or weighty obligation is therein implicated. Whatever “intractable diversities” there may be, they surely cannot be supposed to involve, when Christian union is realised, a contradiction on any prominent moral or religious topic.

Origen.—What are the means by which you expect to witness the accomplishment of such a marvellous consummation?

Theologus.—You do not doubt, that if an unbeliever in the gospel, Pagan, Mohammedan, Jew, Infidel, or Papist, were to *seek the truth*, that God would leave him help-

lessly entangled in damning error; so I believe, that if Christians were to seek the truth, they would escape from their scandalous contradictions and damaging errors. If the world is ultimately to come to believe that Christianity is true, by giving it a devout and diligent attention, and the triumph can be effected in no other way, is it extravagant to expect that by the use of the very same means Christians shall come to know what Christianity in its purity and integrity really is, and thus avoid everything like collision in expounding its doctrines, and in enforcing and obeying its precepts? And if a vigorous and impartial examination, an honest search for truth, may be reasonably expected and authoritatively demanded from the unbeliever, how much more from the believer?

Origen.—After all, the question still re-
 Truth. turns, what is Truth?

Celsus.—Ay, that is the knot that has to be untied.

Theologus.—If we treat Christianity and religion practically, as we treat any other subject practically, there is no call to answer that question. An illiterate Christian can give a reason for the hope that he entertains, without the aid of metaphysics or science. If that reason is judged of, as reasons for *acting* in other matters are judged of, it will stand the test.

Origen.—Do you then decline to answer the question?

Theologus.—No. But I take my main position on practical ground, which shall hereafter be explained and

vindicated at length. So far as the science or speculation of the matter is concerned, I have only a hypothesis to propose for consideration.

Celsus.—How, then, do you propose to define Truth?

Theologus.—We have thought that the foundation of a speculative argument might perhaps be laid thus: knowledge implies an object known, and an intelligent subject knowing. Knowledge is thus the act of the intelligent being, when knowing the object, and may always be expressed in a *proposition*. Hence we would agree with those who have represented *Truth* to be the harmony or *agreement of a proposition (or knowledge) with the object known*. *Error*, consequently, is the *disagreement* of knowledge, or a proposition with its object. Thus we obtain immediately the two kinds of knowledge formerly noticed. Normal or true knowledge is the first of these, in which the agent knows the object, and knows that he knows it. The second, abnormal or erroneous knowledge, is developed, when the agent does not know the object, and thinks he does.

Origen.—One or two points have come up in the course of this discussion, on which I should like to hear your views somewhat more at length.

Theologus.—I myself have felt the desirableness of a fuller exposition of my sentiments, but was unwilling to interrupt the course of argument in which you were engaged with our friend here.

Origen.—I cannot see how you get over the distinction between mathematical and moral truth.

All truth specifically one. *Theologus.*—Since truth is the agreement of a proposition with the object to which it refers, all truth is *specifically one*. No truth, therefore, can with propriety be called *contingent*; although this mode of describing some truths is very old and very common. We may suppose a *contingent existence* to be annihilated, but we cannot suppose any true proposition respecting that existence to become untrue. The statement that Napoleon died at St Helena is true, universally and for ever; that it should ever cease to be true is inconceivable; it is as unchangeably and everlastingly true as any axiom in mathematics.

Sir W. Hamilton not only takes substantially the same view, but explains the philosophy of the case. “I may here also observe,” he says, “that though the *primary truths of fact*, and the *primary truths of intelligence* (the contingent and necessary truths of Reid) form two very distinct classes of the original beliefs or intuitions of consciousness; there appears no sufficient ground to regard their sources as different, and therefore to be distinguished by different names.” The reason which he assigns for this representation is, that the distinction between these two classes of truth is nothing more than “the distinction between the data or deliverances of consciousness *simply, in themselves, as apprehended facts or actual manifestations*; and these deliverances considered as *testimonies to the truth of facts beyond their own phenomenal reality*.”¹

The matter may be represented to the mass of man-

¹ Sir W. Hamilton's Edition of Reid's Works, p.p. 743, 744.

kind thus. Evidence on any point whatever, if valid and sufficient in itself, is irresistible to the intelligent being who gives it due attention. When due attention is withheld, however sufficient and valid the evidence may be, or to whatever subject it may relate, knowledge of the truth is not attained. When a proposition is professedly supported by evidence, the evidence is valid, or it is not. If it be invalid, it is improper to call it evidence at all. When a proposition is supported by valid evidence, this evidence is sufficient, or it is not. When valid evidence is sufficient, the proposition is declared to be true; when insufficient, the proposition is declared to be probable. This principle applies equally well to every kind of propositions, however diverse the objects of the propositions may be. In thus abandoning the distinction between necessary and contingent truth, we also abandon the distinction between moral and demonstrative evidence, especially as this distinction is used in the infidel controversy.

The reason why there is more discrepancy of opinion in morals than in mathematics, seems to be twofold.

1. Moral subjects have far more to do, especially at present, with the region of probability than the exact sciences; and hence there is more occasion and room for diversity of sentiment in the former than in the latter.
2. But, chiefly, there are contradictions in morals when there are none in mathematics, because there is a greater number of *rash* and *prejudiced* judgments in the one than in the other, which may be traced partly to the

fact, that there are stronger temptations in the one than in the other, to pronounce a judgment *without due attention*. The same amount of *honest mental labour*, which is found to be necessary to master many a scientific problem, would put an end to many a moral controversy.

It is not difficult to show that abnormal or erroneous knowledge on any point whatever is not involuntary. If a sum in arithmetic be cast incorrectly, it must be because the mind of the calculator denied, in one part or other of the process, that one and one are equal to two. Since he has the means of attaining perfect certainty and perfect accuracy together, if he shall affirm that the sum is correctly reckoned, when it is not, is there not something wilful in this, and, if wilful, blameable? The same remark applies to every department of science. Is a man not deserving of some censure for saying or thinking of any proposition that it is true, before he has given it proper attention, or before its evidence has been seen by him to be valid and sufficient? If, therefore, any one in olden times affirmed it to be an actual truth that nature abhors a vacuum, did he do so altogether involuntarily and inculpably? Even those who affirmed it to be true, had they duly reflected, must have seen and felt that it was somewhat misty in itself,—or, at all events, that it was not supported by sufficient evidence. Many may have held it as a hypothesis to be examined, not as a conclusion to be trusted.

Hence, we infer, that on every question evidence which is valid and sufficient is irresistible to him who

gives it due consideration, and to him only, and that on no matter whatever can a man innocently or sincerely take truth for error, or error for truth. It thus appears that all true knowledge is equally clear and certain. Mathematical proof is frequently cumulative or complicated, just as moral proof is. An indocile mind can ward off both. If man's welfare were made to depend on the study of Euclid's Elements, individuals would be found to profess that they could not understand them, though they *could* not, just because they *would* not. Others would be found misrepresenting the application of the principles contained in that book to cases in actual life. And many, doubtless, while well acquainted with the principles would set them at practical defiance. To deny the validity of some of Euclid's demonstrations might be described as polite and reasonable when compared with some of the gross and violent perversions that have been practised upon the word of God.

Origen.—There is another topic that needs elucidation, namely, what you have called the validity of the human understanding.

Theologus.—To set this in a forcible and practical light, allow me to quote the words of M. Cousin. His remarks, which we are about to transcribe, will be regarded by many Christians as offensive; they seem to us to be substantially correct. After hearing them it will be necessary for me to show, how this philosopher's principle may be turned against infidelity and in favour of Christianity.

The validity of
reason.

“The Theological School, in order to defend religion to better advantage, undertakes to destroy philosophy, all philosophy, the good as well as the bad, and perhaps the good still more than the bad. . . . Here is the well known argumentation of this school. Reason is a faculty altogether personal. When therefore we affirm anything in the name of reason, it is in the name of our own reason that we affirm it; certainty in that case has no other basis, no other criterion than our individual sentiment; but this is absurd. Reason then cannot give us genuine certainty. Now, reason once proved to be impotent we must look for another authority. This authority is that of common sense opposed to individual sentiment, common sense preserved by tradition, made visible by the church, and promulgated by the Holy See. . . . That no inconsistency may be wanting, the Protestants have found it so admirable that they have not hesitated to borrow it of Catholicism. Open any of the Methodist publications; except in ability, you would think that you were reading the Abbé de la Mennais. The same principles, the same mode of reasoning, the same hatred of reason and philosophy; the only difference is, that the word of God is substituted for common sense, and the Holy Scriptures for the Church. In every philosophy, they say, it is always a man who speaks; it is a single man who addresses himself to our reason with his own; but we wish for no man between us and truth; we wish to surrender our minds to God himself and to his word. Assuredly our adversaries are

not difficult ; but, I ask, who is to teach them that word? Who will warrant them that it is the word of God? What ground have they for believing it? Who shall tell them that God has spoken? And by what sign shall they know it? The former propose to us as proof the researches of erudition and historical criticism; the latter appeal to a sort of immediate illumination in the reading of the Holy Scriptures. But it is not a little strange to refer us to criticism through fear of philosophy; to send us back to history in order to avoid the intervention of men between truth and ourselves. As to immediate illumination, the intervention of reason in that is less evident, but quite as real.”¹

Need I assure you that I have no sympathy with the sneers or the sarcasm contained in this passage. The subject scarcely admits of such treatment. But I have felt it proper to introduce the passage for the purpose of putting the matter vividly before the mind. I am constrained to acknowledge that not a few divines have been found neutralising the distinction between truth and error, or, which is virtually the same thing, abandoning the veracity of reason. It is of the utmost importance to notice how this argument of the philosopher may be retorted against infidelity and ungodliness in some of their subtlest forms.

Origen.—How is this to be done?

Theologus.—Philosophers, as a class of men, shrink most sensitively from anything like an attempt to dis-

¹ Cabinet Library, vol. ix. pp. 34, 37.

criminate between *religious truth* and *religious error*. They thus, inconsistently with their own principles, *limit the extent* of the distinction between truth and error, and so far as the business of religion is concerned deny the validity of the understanding. We blame them, not for not *finding*, but for not *seeking* truth in religion. If philosophy be the pursuit of truth, of *all truth*, we demand a reason why one department of truth is put under a ban. This exclusion can be justified only on one or other of these grounds: because there is no such thing as religious truth; or because its discovery is so difficult it is hopeless to try; or because when found it would be next to worthless.

As to the first, philosophy herself cannot prove a negative. And in regard to the second, granting even, which we do only for the sake of argument, that religious truth were so very hard to find as some represent or misrepresent, the consciousness of this difficulty would prove to the genuine philosopher only an additional stimulus to prosecute his search and promulgate its results. As to the third, even supposing that religious truth when found would scarcely repay the labour of seeking it—a supposition which any man would blush to avow—still it is directly at variance with the noble spirit of science to keep aloof from any field of inquiry, simply because it promises no immediate practical good to the student. *Truth for its own sake* is the watchword of philosophy. Why then have philosophers avoided the domain of truth in religion, as sailors keep clear of a

sunken rock? The fact is as undoubted, as the inferred inconsistency is incontrovertible.

As the most skilful pilot will sometimes be at fault, so philosophers do sometimes, either from constraint or complacency, take up a religious topic. They are occasionally observed mourning over the moral desolations of religious controversy. Alas! with too much reason. Men professedly in pursuit of religious truth, instead of a friendly rivalry, have waged the fiercest warfare with each other, and that not only in an irreligious spirit, but often too about irreligious trifles. The men on the mount of calm contemplation, who see and lament the miseries endured by the toiling masses in the plains below, surely lie under a strong obligation to recall their fellows from such vain and guilty contests by searching for the great realities of religion, and endeavouring to place them in a brilliant light, and pointing the ignorant and erring and unhappy to their benignant effulgence! Have philosophers done so, or made one worthy effort to do so? By ignoring in religion the distinction between truth and error, which they hold to be so important in every thing else, they are convicted of self-inconsistency. By refusing to help their fellow-men, or if they could not help them, to sympathise with them in their religious conflicts, they betray a sad lack of affection. And by deliberately and systematically preferring to pursue truth everywhere but in the religious sphere, they have placed themselves in a position, for the occupation of which they will have to render an account to the God of Truth.

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If an individual having the true knowledge of God refuse to submit his will to the Supreme, this refusal, inasmuch as his knowledge of God's character in its more immediate relations to himself is correct and sound, is exceedingly flagrant and criminal. If, on the other hand, an individual has lost the true knowledge of his God, it shows that he has proceeded no little distance in the downward path of guilt and error. And in neither case, we feel more and more persuaded, can a man actually throw off his allegiance to the Most High, without setting up something or other in His place and before Him. In most of our philosophical writers, even when they are defending the existence of God and illustrating His attributes, there is a gross ignorance or strange disregard of the most vital and commanding distinction which man can ever hope to comprehend,—the distinction between the character of God *as He is in his relations to us*, and that character *misrepresented*. There is also in most of the current literature of the day of all sorts—for religion has become a common topic of late—a similar ignorance or disregard of a distinction which is the first we should know and the last we should forget,—the distinction between the religion of the man whose will is in subjection to the Divine will, and the religion of the man whose will is not in subjection to that will, or, in other words, between *true religion* and *false religion*. Even Plutarch could write, I would rather have men say that there is no Plutarch, than that Plutarch is wicked ; so I reckon it worse to think evil (erroneously) of God, than to deny that God exists.

Philosophy and Literature, to repel this charge, will draw themselves up in a most dignified mien, and while professing to pursue truth in the composure of unruffled seclusion, and to be desirous of having it elicited by the healthy excitement of friendly debate, will protest against the dishonour of soiling their hands or disarranging their robes in the turmoil of heated controversy, and least of all will they consent to be defiled with the mire, or exposed to the perils, of religious strife. This plea is false in fact, and it is futile in philosophy. It is in fact false, for literary and philosophical controversies have neither been few in number, nor wanting in a keen and rancorous spirit. And admitting that religious contentions have been still more numerous and more embittered, it is only what might reasonably be expected on account of the higher interests at stake. The plea is, moreover, worthless on philosophical principles; for it eviscerates the distinction between truth and error of all meaning and value. Better not to admit the distinction at all, than having admitted it in one instance, deny it in another, or, what is worse, depreciate its significance even to nought, and that, too, in the most important of its applications. All argument, and all effort too, are forever at an end, unless truth, yea *all* truth, be precious—so precious, that in the legitimate pursuit of it we may and ought to put forth our utmost strength, and in defence of it when found incur the utmost hazard.

DIALOGUE II.

KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEF.

Celsus.—It has been the opinion of many Christians that men should believe what they do not understand.

Origen.—It is not unreasonable to ask men to act in religious matters on the same principle on which they act in matters of common life. You believe in the union of the soul and the body of a man, although you do not comprehend it.

Celsus.—But our belief is not independent of our understanding or reason in any instance, far less contrary to it. Let me put the question in this form : May our belief in any case be considered legitimate, when it is not founded upon knowledge ?

Does Belief always rest upon knowledge ?

Origen.—“ The truth is, that both Reason and Faith are coeval with the nature of man, and were designed to dwell in his heart together. They are, and ever were, and, in such creatures as ourselves, must be, reciprocally complementary ; neither can exclude the other. It is as impossible to exercise an acceptable faith without reason for so exercising it,—that is, without exercising reason

while we exercise faith,—as it is to apprehend by our reason, exclusive of faith, all the truths on which we are daily compelled to *act*, whether in relation to this world or the next.”¹

Celsus.—I do not quite understand you. Do reason and faith *invariably* act together, or not? If they do not *always* accompany each other in the act of being exercised, when do they accompany each other, and when do they act separately and independently? If they are *constantly* found to be reciprocally complementary, do they act contemporaneously, or if not, which of them precedes the other? Does knowledge precede faith, or does faith precede knowledge?

Origen.—But this argumentation is based upon “the fundamental vice,” which “consists in the application of purely logical or inductive conceptions to moral truth, while this truth in its very nature transcends the grasp of logic. It makes itself good in the inner spiritual consciousness, but it cannot be inductively seized and accounted for. The attempt so to seize it necessarily terminates in misapprehending it.”²

Celsus.—Then, of course, there can be no such thing as moral science. But, passing this, Christians themselves begin the attempt to discriminate between belief and knowledge. Nay, you are forced to do so by your own Bible. You cannot maintain that your Christian

¹ Reason and Faith: their Claims and Conflicts. By Henry Rogers. London. Fourth Edition. 1854. P. 1, 2.

² Theism, p. 342.

faith is reasonable, without shewing that it is founded upon knowledge. Is it so in every instance, or is it not?

Origen.—"If in the actual course of our education for another state of existence we give an unchecked ascendancy to either reason or faith, we vitiate the whole process."¹

Celsus.—But in some instances at least you give, if not an ascendancy, at least a decided priority, to the exercise of reason;—in those cases, I mean, in which you contend for the reasonableness of your belief. In what instances may belief take ascendancy or priority of the exercise of reason or the understanding? If there be such cases, we shall have not a reasonable belief, but a believing, confiding, or implicit knowledge. Is there such a thing as knowledge resting upon faith; while that faith does not itself rest upon knowledge?

Origen.—"All knowledge must rest upon intuitions, or self-evident truths, or upon faith in the veracity of the faculties. Man enters upon the use of his reasoning faculty, already furnished with the principles on which all knowledge must be built. In his first experience, reason and feeling unite and are inseparable from one another."²

Celsus.—But even in this case the "feeling" is peculiar and quite distinct from our common feelings:—what the same author calls a "conscious feeling."³ Of the

¹ Reason and Faith, p. 3.

² Christian Theism, vol. 1, p. 344.

³ *Ib.*, vol. 2, p. 373.

most elementary or fundamental truth, is it not correct to say, that we *believe* it, only inasmuch as we *know* it, rather than, that we know it, because we believe it?

Theologus.—The conclusion, then, seems not unlikely to be this, that *knowledge invariably precedes belief*.

Human mind de-terminator of religious truth.

Origen. — But this conclusion leaves us without defence against the modern German school, “amid whose bewildering and shifting speculations, one thing is especially observable, namely, that the human mind is made the determinator of religious truth, and that no weight is given to the external facts and evidences of revelation except in so far as they harmonize with the inward sentiments and conceptions.”¹

Celsus.—You will at least go thus far, that a man cannot receive on external testimony or evidence of any sort, what contradicts his inward conceptions and sentiments.

Origen.—Granted; for “faith and philosophy are not enemies by nature.”

Internal evidences.

Celsus.—There are some of your friends who admit or contend that the harmony between a man’s inward sentiments and judgments on the one hand, and the Bible on the other, is a most essential and indispensable element of the evidence that proves the Bible to be of divine origin. You must, therefore, either abandon the *internal* evidences entirely and for ever, or admit that in a valid and important sense the human mind is the determinator of religious truth.

¹ Infidelity, &c., p. 363.

Origen.—You cannot, however, go so far as to maintain, that “first principles must be settled on philosophical and dogmatic grounds, before the interpretation of the Scriptures can take effect.”¹

Celsus.—Then you do not agree with your friend who says, “Christianity is not a religion for the religious, but a religion for man. I do not accept it because my temperament so disposes me, and because it meets my individual mood of mind, or my tastes. I accept it as it is suited to that moral condition in respect of which there is no difference of importance between me and the man I may next encounter on my path.”² Well now, you must either accept of Christianity thus, or accept of it without knowing whether it be suited to your moral state or not. If the knowledge of its adaptation to the common moral condition of men be supposed necessary prior to its being accepted, and as an essential element in the ground on which it is accepted, this implies that a knowledge of the moral state of man, as man, has been attained, before interpreting or even receiving the Scriptures. The first principles of ethics are thus settled independently of the Bible; nay their settlement is indispensable to a belief in the Bible; and if they have not been settled on “philosophical and dogmatic grounds,” they have been loosely and popularly assumed. But is there not an attempt among Christians to settle the first principles of morals on strictly philosophical grounds?

¹ Infidelity, p. 365.

² The Restoration of Belief. Cambridge, 1855. p. 325.

Theology and Philosophy at variance.

Origen.—Yes; there have been many attempts, but not with much success. But, then, you know, “There might be a false philosophy in our colleges, and yet a true theology might retain a strong hold on the hearts of our people.”¹

Celsus.—That is very convenient, truly. If the philosophy and the theology relate to distinct matters and questions, the remark is out of place. But if the philosophy and the theology referred to relate to the same matters, and be really inconsistent with each other, then the people think differently from their religious teachers, or the teachers themselves are false either to their philosophical or their theological principles.

Origen.—Do you concede that “the moral judgment is often found to be limited?”

Limit of moral judgment.

Celsus.—It were most absurd to deny that it is not limited. The sole question is, what are its limits?

Origen.—“There is no infallible criterion of right and wrong. The law is not always written in clear and intelligible characters. Man is not, in fact, as God created him: different tribes and individuals sink to different depths of moral degeneracy.”²

Celsus.—Well, then, do any sink so low as to be destitute entirely of “moral judgment?”

Origen.—Probably some do; but certainly not all.

Celsus.—Then those who do sink so low, as to be destitute of all moral judgment, and “who have forfeited

¹ Infidelity, p. 361.

² Christian Theism, vol. ii. p. 224.

the right of being enumerated with the human race,"¹ cannot be held as responsible, and to preach the gospel to them is, of course, a work of supererogation. Again, if "the judgments and feelings of mankind, notwithstanding the prevalence of vice, are all but unanimous in favour of virtue,"² then, we must know what virtue is, and consequently we have a criterion, if not an universal, at least a limited, "criterion of right and wrong."

Origen.—But that criterion is not *infallible*.

Celsus.—It is just as infallible, as the validity of the understanding, or the veracity of reason, can make it. Christians themselves say so—let me read from the same book. "We can often be sure of the distinction between right and wrong, between good and evil. Conscience has a natural preference for virtue and benevolence, and gives us some acquaintance with our duty to each other and to God. We have also an experience of the needs and aspirations of the soul. So far, then, as our moral knowledge extends, we are able to judge of the internal evidences of Christianity; and may, by the light of nature, discover its superiority to systems of false religion."³ When this author says, there is no *infallible* criterion of right and wrong, one feels curious to know what more is needed, than "*to be sure* of the distinction between right and wrong." If the evidence of Christianity rest upon "*moral knowledge*," attained "*by the light of nature*," that knowledge must be somewhat like infallible before it can sustain, as you believe, such a weight.

¹ Christian Theism, vol. ii. p. 73.

² *Ib.*, p. 73.

³ *Ib.*, p. 223

Theologus.—The simplest way to bring the question to an issue, is to ask for an example, in which a legitimate faith is not based upon knowledge.

Origen.—Well, Columbus *believed* in the existence of America, before he knew it.¹

Celsus.—Did he not believe in it, after he knew it? Was not his belief in it after he knew it, very different from his belief in it before he knew it? Is your belief in Christianity, like his belief in it before he knew it—a guess, a conjecture? But surely you do not pretend to say, that Columbus' expectation, or belief, of finding a great western continent, was utterly baseless in his own mind. It did rest upon patient and learned investigation, — upon knowledge.

Faith a source
of knowledge.

Origen.—But faith itself is a source of knowledge. You must believe in first principles before you can acquire much knowledge; and our Christian faith leads us into much knowledge.

Celsus.—But our belief in first principles, as formerly remarked, is not without a knowledge of these principles, a knowledge that they are true. We could not believe them, unless we knew their self-evident truth.

Theologus.—A similar remark is applicable to the Christian's faith. A Book or Person whom *we know* to be worthy of our confidence may convey to us important information, which we could not obtain elsewhere; but in this case our faith in the Person or book is based

¹ See Reason and Faith, p. 22.

upon our knowledge of his or its credibility. Correctly speaking, therefore, it is not faith that is a source of knowledge, but the object of that faith.

No moral know-
ledge without the
Bible.

Origen.—But is it not a fact, “that all civilised nations of ancient or modern times, can be shewn to have derived instruction, either from the Scriptures or from Scriptural traditions? The people who have been found destitute of such traditions and beyond the reach of the Christian revelation, are always reduced to a savage condition; and they who have possessed the traditions alone, without the aids of more recent revelations, give evidences in their history, or in their records, sometimes in very distinct terms, that their nation has passed through a course not of development, but of degradation.”¹

Celsus.—In the first place, this is reasoning from what man *has* done, to what man *might* do, and *ought* to do. Now it is unfair to apply this principle to the heathen and not to the Christian world. If it be good in the one case, it is good in the other. If the contradictions and vices of the heathen prove that they could do no more than they have done,—that the moral and religious knowledge attainable by reason and nature independently of the Christian Scriptures is nought, then the contradictions and vices of Christendom prove that Christianity can do no more than it has accomplished, and the moral and religious knowledge attainable from the Bible is next to nought. *Evangelical* Christians are a small minority

¹ Christian Theism, v. ii. p. 263.

amongst their brethren. In the second place, this reasoning invalidates the internal evidences of Christianity.

Theologus.—There seem to be two methods of argument open to the defenders of the Christian religion. They may, in the first place, rest the whole weight of the evidence upon *miracles*, as some do. If miracles alone cannot sustain the whole weight, as others think, they may, in the second place, associate with miracles the judgments or intuitions, or whatever other name they receive, of man's moral nature. But if man's moral nature in any of its developments is to be brought into court to prove the divine origin of Christianity, it must be such developments as are independent of Christian influences. Whoever asserts that *all* our moral knowledge is derived from the Scriptures, necessarily excludes that moral knowledge as evidence in favour of Christianity.

Origen —We firmly believe that “truth must lie beneath all the monstrous systems of Pagan theology.”¹

Celsus.—Very good; but if *all* the truth that lies beneath the systems of Paganism be derived, directly or indirectly, from the Christian Scriptures, that truth cannot be fairly adduced in attestation of the Bible. The above reasoning, moreover, invalidates the whole argument of Natural Theology. For if all our instruction, all that we possess beyond those who are in a savage con-

¹ Christian Theism, v. ii. p. 315.

dition, be derived from the Bible, our laboured treatises on Theism are so much waste paper.

Origen.—"There is a revelation of God in man and nature, yet it has not been interpreted without supernatural aid." ¹

Celsus.—If that revelation *could not* be interpreted without supernatural aid, then, while it remains alone, it cannot be regarded as a revelation at all. Besides, if the Christian Scriptures be necessary to interpret God's revelation of Himself in man and in nature, this revelation can give no independent or valid testimony in favour of the Christian Scriptures.

Theologus.—It is scarcely correct to say, that, even with supernatural aid, this revelation has been interpreted; for we have already seen that Natural Theology, as at present expounded, is full of contradictions. If it be an obvious inconsistency in the unbelievers "to receive from Jesus Christ the highest truth they know of God, and then reject the God whom He reveals;" ² it is as gross an inconsistency in the believer to appeal to man's moral nature, to his ethical knowledge and judgment, in proof of the character of God, and in attestation of the pure morals and divine origin of the Bible, and then, when the occasion is different, to turn round and say, that without the Bible man is only a savage, without any moral knowledge, and utterly destitute of the means of improvement.

¹ Christian Theism, v. ii. p. 167.

² *Ib.* p. 231.

Belief in what is
not understood.

Origen.—Are we, then, to believe nothing which we do not understand? Is faith never above reason and beyond knowledge?

Celsus.—If you were always satisfied with this demand, we should have less difficulty in reasoning out the matter with you. Nothing will satisfy some Christians, but to put out the eye of reason altogether.

Theologus.—To contend that religious faith is belief in the truth, and therefore reasonable, and, at the same time, admit or assume, tacitly or openly, that, in any instance, it is independent of knowledge, or contrary to the understanding, is inadmissible as a clear contradiction.

Origen.—But this is not answering the question.

Theologus.—Well, the question which you propose, and which involves a serious difficulty which has been often felt, may be answered by attending to the fact that there are two distinct kinds of knowledge.

Origen.—What new distinction is this, that is to work such wonders?

Theologus.—The distinction does not appear to be either novel or obscure. It has not certainly been generally applied to the case in hand; but in itself it is an old acquaintance to most people.

Origen.—Ha! Railroads were not so much indebted to a new principle, as the novel application of an old one.

Theologus.—A proposition or statement may be known simply to be true, while it is not known *how* or *why* it is true. Another proposition I may not only know to be

true, but I may also know how or why it is true. We may know a fact without knowing its explanation. We may know another fact, and not only itself, but its explanation also. We know the size of the earth, and its position in relation to the sun ; but we do not know why it is so large, no larger and no smaller. We know how far it is from the sun ; but we do not know why it was not placed nearer or further off. We know that water rises in a pump to a certain height ; and we also know a reason why it rises exactly so high, neither more nor less. Since we cannot know the reason or manner of a fact, without knowing first the fact itself, the one of these knowledges, the complex one, always presupposes and implies the other, or the simple one. But the simple one may be found without the complex.

Origen.—How will this distinction help us ?

Theologus.—We should never believe a statement till *we know* that it is true, that it states a fact, or an undoubted principle. We must often believe statements, because we know them to be true or to announce facts, although we are entirely ignorant of the *manner* or *mode* of the fact, and utterly incapable of understanding *how* or *why* the principle which we believe is true.

The difficulties
of Faith.

Origen.—Has faith, then, no difficulties with which to contend, and over which to achieve a triumph ?

Theologus.—What do you consider to be the difficulties that lie in the path of belief ?

Origen.—"The evidence is sufficient to justify our

faith, but it is not irresistible. There are other facts which seem to conflict with the doctrine. Darkness and difficulties, which have been felt by the best men in every age, beset us in this field of inquiry. But what is the darkness to the light?"¹

Celsus.—I always thought that light dispelled darkness. Or after all are Christians still in a field where light and darkness mingle,—in the twilight?

Theologus.—If facts really *conflict* with your belief, it cannot be a very steady or satisfactory one. If facts only *seem* to come into collision with your belief, while there is actually no collision at all, I am at a loss to perceive what difficulty or darkness there is in such a circumstance, except the difficulty of getting at the truth. As to the evidence not being irresistible, that is saying nothing. It only amounts to this, that man is a free agent, and responsible.

Origen.—"Faith is a moral act, and, while resting on a strong ground-work of proof, it must have some difficulties over which to triumph. Origen (the Christian Father whose name I unworthily bear), speaking of the difficulties in the Bible revelation, and of those in the revelation of nature, says: 'In both we see a self-concealing, self-revealing God, who makes Himself known only to those who earnestly seek Him; in both are found stimulants to faith, and occasions for unbelief?'"²

Theologus.—So far well. But still there is no very

¹ Infidelity, p. 328.

² Ib. p. 329.

explicit statement of difficulties. How can *what God conceals* be a difficulty worth naming to our cordially receiving what He reveals of Himself?

Origen.—But is it not very perplexing to faith to reconcile the painful facts transpiring in the world—war, oppression, slavery, sickness, and poverty, as well as many statements in the Bible, with the Equity and Benevolence of God?

Theologus.—I can understand how you feel these to be trials to your intellect; but how do they affect your faith, so far as you believe only what you are satisfied is true? Or does your faith embrace statements which you do not even know to be true?

Origen.—What may seem a paradox in itself is in fact a great principle applicable to this matter. “When there is no reason to doubt, there can be none to believe. Faith ever stands between conflicting probabilities; but her position is (if we may use the metaphor) the centre of gravity between them, and will be proportionally nearer the greater mass.”¹

Celsus.—If this were the universal opinion of Christians, we should not have so much trouble in overthrowing Christianity; as the position of this centre of gravity is obviously one of unstable equilibrium. How differently the matter is put by another writer.—“Whoever charges himself with such a task as that of conveying to the intelligence and reason of others a system or body of truth—of whatever kind—must be understood to have

¹ Reason and Faith, p. 22.

come upon his ground in some such manner as this : that is to say—he professes to understand the subject of which he is to treat ; and those to whom he speaks must believe that he does understand it, and that he is familiar with all parts of it, including its most difficult problems. They must listen to him on the belief that what he affirms to be true, he knows to be demonstrable ; and they must believe too that he is prepared, at the last, to meet and remove all reasonable objections. There is nothing in the circle of philosophy, of criticism, of history, or of physical science, that can fairly be set forth and established, unless, formally or virtually, as much as this is postulated on the one side, and is cheerfully allowed on the other.”¹ In this way, faith certainly does not “ stand between conflicting probabilities.”

Origen.—Are there no difficulties in the way of exercising faith ?

Theologus. — A *reasonable* objection to the truth of what is believed is not properly a difficulty in the way of exercising faith, but a prohibition against its exercise in that particular case. An *unreasonable* objection should, of course, go for nothing.

Origen. — You expect, then, at least, satisfaction to your intellect. I thought no one but an infidel would dispute the wise remarks of Dr Arnold. “ Here is the moral fault of unbelief—that a man can bear to make so great a moral sacrifice, as is implied in renouncing God. He makes the greatest

Satisfaction to the intellect.

¹ Restoration of Belief, p. 259, 260.

moral sacrifice to obtain partial satisfaction to his intellect: A believer ensures the greatest moral perfection, with partial satisfaction to his intellect also: entire satisfaction to the intellect is, and can be, obtained by neither.”¹

Celsus.—The sacrificing of one part of our nature to another is what we sedulously avoid; because we believe it to be wrong. To do so is the creed of certain Christians. Morals separate from, or independent of reason, is only another name for prejudice and superstition.

Theologus.—To deny that man can obtain entire satisfaction to his intellect, is ambiguous and dangerous. If by “entire satisfaction” you mean a knowledge of all things; that satisfaction is unreasonable and absurd. But that man can and may obtain a proper, legitimate, and, therefore, complete, satisfaction to his intellect, is neither at variance with common sense nor Christianity. And if there be not in this sense an entire satisfaction to our understanding in believing the gospel of Christ as true, we have little hope of escaping from the mists of superstition, and of seeing the world converted to the Lord Jesus.

Origen.—What then do you call a reasonable and entire satisfaction to the intellect?

Theologus.—We shall be able to obtain full and legitimate satisfaction to the intellect, if we allow that the intellect acts properly under these two conditions: First, that every man who duly seeks the truth on any point

¹ Infidelity, p. 325.

shall not err on that point ; and, secondly, that when we know a statement or proposition to be true, we believe it, although we do not know how or why it is true.

Origen. — According to this representation, faith has no difficulties to struggle with whatever.

Theologus.—Plenty, my friend, plenty. Are there no difficulties in seeking and finding the truth ? Are there no difficulties in acting consistently upon the truth when found ? It may not be precisely correct to say, that faith has difficulties to master ; but the man who would believe the truth and act upon this belief, has them in formidable abundance. To suppose that *doubt* must ever mingle with our faith itself, is not to try it, but to strangle it.

Origen.—But what advantage is gained by your assertion that faith ought to be invariably based upon what you have called simple knowledge ?

Theologus.—If you once abandon this position, or impair its integrity, you have no defence against *superstition*, enthusiasm, or mysticism, or whatever else it may be called.

Superstition.

Origen.—The transition from superstition to infidelity has been often made ; but you do not mean to plead that this transition is allowable and legitimate, or that the superstitions of the pious justify the unbelief of the ungodly ?

Celsus.—If superstition be found in the statement of Christian doctrine or of its evidences, the presence of that superstition does not of itself indeed justify our infidelity,

but you must allow that it so far weakens and damages your own cause.

Origen.—How would you describe superstition?

Theologus.—It cannot be better described than in language suggested by our present conversation. Belief in a proposition or statement which the believer does not know to be true, or belief which does not rest upon knowledge, is superstitious. So far as this principle is not recognised distinctly and broadly, or so far as it is not acted upon in the details of religious life, so far does Christianity suffer at the hands of its friends.

Origen.—Your definition or description of superstition will apply almost equally well to infidelity.

Theologus.—How so?

Origen.—Because, when any man denies one or more of the truths of the Bible, and is on that account reckoned an infidel, his denial implies a belief that such or such a doctrine is not true, and we of course affirm that his belief does not rest upon knowledge.

Theologus.—Your remark is well-founded, and shows us that infidelity and superstition are so far the same, that they both have their roots in self-deception, or, more precisely, in mental dishonesty and insincerity. Their developments, however, endlessly vary with the circumstances in which men are placed, and the peculiarities of individual character.

Origen.—You formerly spoke of abnormal knowledge;—what difference is there between that, and belief without knowledge?

Theologus.—None. It appears to us that belief and knowledge are correlative. What a man believes, he knows; and what he knows, he believes. Normal knowledge is accompanied by a normal belief; and abnormal knowledge by an abnormal belief. If, as we saw, a man honestly and diligently seek to know the truth, he will not err on that point to which his attention is thus directed. Then his knowledge and belief will be normal. He will not only know and believe what is true, but he will also be conscious and certain of knowing and believing the truth. When, on the contrary, an individual takes up an opinion loosely or carelessly, or at second hand, *if the opinion be false*, he thinks he knows, when he does not know. His knowledge and belief are both abnormal. Even the light which is in him is darkness. This is the case to which reference is made above when we speak of belief not based upon knowledge.

Origen.—But what do you say of the case in which a man takes up an opinion carelessly or loosely or at second hand, while yet the opinion is really and in itself true? You cannot then say that the individual thinks he knows when he does not know.

Theologus.—Of course, not. The case, however, is easily described. A proposition may be true in itself, and a person may *profess* to believe and know it to be true, while in fact he has never paid due attention to it, or given it impartial consideration. This is an obvious case of self-deception as really as the former;—accepting,

or rather pretending to accept, as true, what we do not know on its own merits to be true.

Origen.—If superstition and infidelity be thus fundamentally the same, namely, abnormal knowledge and belief in one form or another, is not the genuine disciple of Christ free from superstition as he is from infidelity?

Theologus.—A man may be a genuine disciple of the Lord Jesus, without being immediately or absolutely delivered from all erroneous knowledge. He may reject some truth, or accept some error in religion, without forfeiting salvation;—on this principle, that a man may be diligent and upright in seeking the truth on one question, but not equally so in seeking it on another question. One thing is needful, and if a man be conscientious and vigilant on that point, he will be “a saint;” if on that point he lack candour or assiduity, he may go off either into the desert of unbelief, or the swamp of superstition.

Origen.—You once said that no man is wrong on every topic, and now you affirm that no man is right on every question. How can that be? You maintain that the Christian is, or may be, wrong on some points; and you have contended that no more can be said against the infidel than that he is wrong only on some points, not on all. Pray, what difference, then, is there between them?

Theologus.—The consequences of being
 Essential and non-essential truth. in error on any topic depend upon the value and importance of that topic. If a man lives and

dies in error on the main question between God and his own soul, his error is fatal and irretrievable. If a person is right on that question, which is to every one the first and chief, he is not necessarily exempted from error on other questions of secondary moment. While yet error on any one question whatever cannot but be deleterious.

Origen.—You adopt, then, the distinction between essential and non-essential truth. But how is this distinction to be reconciled with the eternal and immutable antithesis between truth and error?

Theologus.—The expression, *essential and non-essential truth*, is loose, and apt to mislead. Every truth, regarded in itself, is essential. But one truth may be more important to a person in certain circumstances than another. When an individual is labouring under a fatal disease, the knowledge of an effectual remedy is of all things else most precious to him. So to mankind as guilty before God, the knowledge of the gospel, that is, of pardon and salvation through a crucified Redeemer, is beyond all else needful and important.

Origen.—You deny, then, the salvability of the heathen, or of men who are from their circumstances unavoidably ignorant of the gospel of Christ.

Theologus.—By no means. For there is a double ambiguity in the distinction between essential and non-essential truth. Every truth, as was remarked, is in itself equally essential; and moreover, it cannot be said of any one truth, that a man will perish everlastingly

through ignorance of it, if his ignorance were in his condition altogether unavoidable and necessary.

Origen.—What is the use, then, of sending the gospel to the heathen, if they can be saved without it?

Theologus.—No man can be saved but through the blood of Christ. It is one thing to say, that salvation is only through Christ, and quite another thing to affirm, that it is only through a *knowledge* of Christ. You admit, I presume, that infants are saved by Christ without their knowing Him. The cases in which there is a *possibility* of salvation open to men ignorant of the gospel are only those, in which ignorance is entirely unavoidable, so far as the personal efforts of the parties immediately concerned extend. It can never be maintained that a man shall be condemned for lack of knowledge, which he had not the means of attaining.

As to the uses of sending missionaries to Pagan lands. To send them is the command of the Lord Jesus; where the gospel is unknown, heathen ignorance will be required at the hands of indolent Christians; and though the poor pagan who gropes after God in the dark, “calling upon the name of the Lord” (Rom. x. 13), shall be saved, no sinner can obtain *present peace* with God but through a knowledge of his crucified Saviour. This peace is of inestimable value in itself, as well as the foundation, not of ethical knowledge or responsibility, but of every excellency in moral or holy character.—There is surely nothing to alarm you in the statement, that while the *objective ground* of salvation remains for ever unchanged,

the *subjective conditions* of salvation may vary, at least in their developments with the varying circumstances of men.

Origen.—What truths, then, are essential, and which are non-essential?

Theologus.—They who hold the distinction may answer your question. I have already said, that every truth is in itself equally essential; and if at any time one truth be more needful or useful to one person than to another, this must depend entirely upon the characters and circumstances of the parties.

Origen.—Then you abandon the distinction between essential and non-essential truths, as it is generally understood.

Theologus.—How is it generally understood?

Origen.—In some such way as this. There are some truths which a man cannot neglect without endangering his salvation, while there are others which he may safely leave alone.

Theologus.—It seems to me that there are no truths whatever, which an individual ought to know and which he might know, that he can with safety leave alone. This is a doctrine which is often proclaimed; but none is more derogatory to truth, or dangerous to the church. Of course, if you take up the case of any one individual, it is most undoubtedly correct to say, that there are some truths a *knowledge* of which is essential to him,—essential to his responsibility and essential to his salvation. Will you assert that the *amount of knowledge* which is

essential to one man,—an ignorant and unprivileged man, is all that is expected or will be required of other men possessed of better advantages ?

Origen.—What, then, is essential to salvation ?

Theologus.—*Objectively*, the atonement of Christ is essential to every man's salvation, and *subjectively*, it is essential that a man earnestly and habitually strive to add to his knowledge, and also to act up to the knowledge which he has attained.

Origen.—Do you intend to assert that Christianity or the true religion is a constant state of flux, and that the terms of man's acceptance with God is subject to ceaseless change ?

Theologus.—Will you deny that *man's knowledge* of the true religion or Christianity has been in a constant state of ebb and flow ? Have not nations that once knew it sunk into ignorance or error regarding it ? Did not Paul know more of it than Abraham, and Luther than Jerome ? The *ground* of pardon through the blood of Christ alone is not altered or set aside, by supposing that God demands more knowledge from a man of superior advantages than from one of inferior privilege, and that too as involved in the very terms or *condition* of his personal salvation.

Origen.—That is, what is essential truth to a man educated among evangelical Christians, or the truth without a knowledge and belief of which *he* cannot be saved, is not in all its extent essential to the papist of Italy or Spain ; and what is essential to such a papist is not in its

whole compass essential to a person born and nurtured in the midst of heathen idolatry.

Theologus.—Precisely so. And hence the truth a knowledge of which may be essential in this age of Christianity, is more than what was essential in the last. As the human race advances in knowledge, collectively or individually, the possible range of superstition becomes in this way less and less, and the possible range of infidelity becomes wider and wider. Many of the superstitions which in bygone ages have corrupted Christianity are exploded for ever, and can never return to the light of day. Christianity is thus from age to age presenting a more extended front and a sharper outline, and her open enemies are finding more numerous points of attack.

Origen.—I now perceive, also, how to explain the fact that has been often witnessed of men rushing from the frivolities of superstition to the blasphemies of infidelity, or, *vice versa*, from the apathy of unbelief to the excesses of enthusiasm.

Celsus.—It is time enough to talk in that vaunting style, when you have purged yourselves of all superstitious prejudices.

Origen.—When we have found a portion of the truth, my friend, we may surely utter it. There is only one way of course in which a man can be right—namely, to “seek the truth as silver, and search for her as for hid treasures,” and having found the truth to act upon it. There seem to be, at the same time, these two great trunk-roads of evil-doing, in one or other of which every

“fool,” and every “simple one” (Prov. i. 22), will be found. The man who “does not obey the truth, but obeys unrighteousness,” has only this wretched alternative before him, to amuse and stupify his conscience either by the mummeries of superstition or the sophisms of infidelity. Nor is it difficult or uncommon when the mind has proved the worthlessness of the one remedy to make a desperate trial of the other.

Theologus.—You may also notice that both of these high roads have many by-ways, which are constantly crossing and re-crossing each other. A sensitive mind when awakened to a perception of some superstitious observance or opinion clinging to the Christian community in which he finds himself, is easily tempted to reject with that superstition some fundamental truth. Again, a strong mind when disgusted with the extravagancies of enthusiasm prevailing around him, may heedlessly take refuge on the barren rock of Atheism,—and when tired of his heartless sojourn there, may seek satisfaction in mystic observances. And so on in many different ways.

Origen.—“The proper and best defence of Christianity is, that it be understood.”

Theologus.—Most clearly. Hence so long as anything superstitious—any thing that is not “true, or honourable, or just, or pure, or lovely, or of good report,” is found attached to Christian modes of worship, or forms of government, or authorised creeds, as well as to Christian conduct, Christianity herself is so far burlesqued or

defamed before the world, and so far also her defences are impaired or removed.

Origen.—What, then, are some of the leading superstitions that have damaged the cause of Christ?

Theologus.—The statement of those belonging to past ages is the work of the ecclesiastical historian; the exposure of those now prevalent is perhaps not the duty of any one man. If Christians would feel the importance of examining anew their respective positions, and would humbly seek the truth on every controverted question, scrupulously suspending their judgment till the clear sunshine of truth beamed on their understanding, much, very much would speedily be done to improve and increase the church of Christ, and to bless the unbelieving world.

Celsus.—Perhaps you will favour us with some of your thoughts on the superstitions of the present day.

Theologus.—I should not like to do so, without, at the same time, endeavouring to expose some of the more latent forms of infidelity.

Origen.—Well, well, let us have both.

Theologus.—Let us, then, assume this as our fundamental position, *that to be reasonable is to be religious, and a man is religious only so far as he is reasonable.* It follows from this, or is involved in it, that sacred truth and secular truth, though not identical, are specifically the same. They differ, and yet they agree; they are varieties of one species. This view may be disregarded, and error introduced in two ways; either by denying

the specific agreement, or asserting the absolute identity, of religious truth and other truth. In the former case, these two varieties of truth will be placed in a hostile attitude towards each other; in the latter, they will be amalgamated; and in both cases serious injury will be the result. Each of these errors, moreover, assumes two distinct forms, according as the preference is given to the one variety of truth over the other. When sacred and secular truth are identified, one party will merge the sacred in the secular, and become rationalistic or infidel; another party will merge the secular in the sacred, and become superstitious. When the specific unity of sacred and secular truth is denied, religion will sometimes be found bleeding at the altar of rationalism, and reason will sometimes be found bleeding at the altar of superstition.

Rationalistic antagonism between reason and religion.

Origen.—What then do you regard as some manifestations of the rationalistic antagonism between Science and Christianity?

Theologus.—To treat Christian or religious truth, as if it did not, or could not, form one of the sciences, but stood on lower ground, is evidently unphilosophical. For the learned to be ignorant or neglectful of it, to an extent that they would be ashamed of in their treatment of any other science, is to act inconsistently with their own principles. An individual of any pretensions to learning would blush to avow an entire ignorance of the leading facts and general principles of any branch of knowledge.

Although every one has his own favourite pursuit, who would consent to be always confined to it? True philosophy, then, forbids that any one who has pretensions to science, should remain unacquainted with true religion—that is, Biblical Christianity.

The force of this statement is to a great extent felt and acknowledged at the present time. There are few, if any, intelligent men who have not had the claims of the Christian Revelation forced upon their attention in such a way, that they cannot continue to occupy a position of neutrality. When the alternative of receiving or rejecting the Christian Scriptures is seriously contemplated, the majority of minds tremble at the thought of rejection; for a moment's consideration is enough to satisfy the reflecting man, that to renounce the Bible, is to renounce not only all religion, but all science too. Hence there are very few philosophers now, who do not manifest towards the Bible respectful deference; and there are comparatively few treatises or lectures of the many that are making science popular, in which, as occasion offers, some suitable allusion to the Bible does not occur.

But is the treatment of the Bible, and of the God of the Bible, consistent throughout? It is admitted to be a canon of modern science, that no branch of knowledge can with propriety or consistency be neglected by the human mind. Philosophers have often felt themselves under the necessity of contending for this principle, in opposition to those who would disparage certain depart-

ments of study, under the plea that they are not important to the general cultivation and industrial advancement of the human family. It is a puerile presumption to attempt to affix a stigma to certain researches, and proscribe them as “purely theoretical”—unworthy of notice or investigation. Reason emphatically condemns such a contracted notion, and experience has amply evinced its vanity. The investigation which promises least to-day, may perform most to-morrow. The artizan and tradesman have sneered at as futile, or smiled at as simply amusing, the abstruse studies of a Davy or a Laplace, which, by and by, however, have issued in the most astonishing and beneficial discoveries. Under a precisely similar and equally erroneous notion, scientific men have been found sneering or smiling at the Christian student, as engaged in a pursuit hopeless, unprofitable, and dull, while their own cherished principles could tell them, that possibly from that very study the weightiest and grandest results may be evolved. If it be unreasonable, as it clearly is, to think of drawing a veil over any portion of God’s works,—if each footstep of the Almighty has, *prima facie*, an equal claim upon our earnest attention,—if His operations are all equally worthy of devout examination, then the facts of the Bible demand as careful a consideration at least as the facts of Geology, and the page of inspiration as rational and reverential a contemplation as the face of the firmament.

The human body is an object of science, on which many thousands of hours and volumes of investigation

have been lavished. Its varities, its size, its colour, its nutrition, its reproduction, all its organs and all their uses, its diseases and its dissolution, have become the themes of intellectual inquiry. May it, then, be affirmed that its ultimate and eternal destiny is a matter with which reason has little or nothing to do? It may be said, that reason has no appropriate means by which she may become acquainted with that matter. Is there not a telescope, by the use of which that far distant object, our body's everlasting destiny, may be discovered and examined? Are there not accurate and accessible tables of computation, by a reference to which the future events that await different bodies may be foretold? This telescope is Divine Revelation; these tables are the laws of God. Is it objected that these are not scientific instruments? The answer is obvious and conclusive,—science refuses no instrument whatever which discovers or authenticates *facts*.

Nor is any fact removed from the field of science by its remoteness in space, or by its distance in time, by the minuteness of its object, or by the difficulty of its explanation. Remoteness in space only fixes the philosopher's gaze more intently; distance in time only summons all his energies to the task; minuteness of parts only tests his untiring patience; difficulty of explanation only fires his genius; while each of these stimulates to seek the improvement of instruments and the development of resources. Littleness waxes great under the microscopic lens; distance is annihilated by the gigantic telescope;

intricacy has well-nigh disappeared under the wand of the infinitesimal calculus; and centuries look like hours in the eye of the geologist. If the Bible were an instrument of human invention or construction, and possessed its present power of giving nearness to what is distant, and visibility to what is unseen, and certainty to what is doubtful, there is no tyro of any scientific school but would labour to purchase and long to employ it. Which is the greater folly, to decline the aid of a human invention, or that of a Divine gift?

But some will say, where is this fallacy manifested in practical life? It pervades the more intelligent classes of society. For example, it seems to us to be clearly involved in the very constitution of our Philosophical and Mechanics' Institutions. Their object is to instruct the people in everything that is interesting, profitable, and true. Variety is sedulously sought after in literature, history, and sciences, so that everything may be introduced which can either touch human feelings, or augment human enjoyments, or extend human prospects. But one subject is silently, yet carefully and universally, excluded, namely, religious truth, as embracing man's relations to his God, his present peace and his future destiny. What is the reason of this exclusion? It cannot with any force or propriety be maintained, that this religious truth has nothing to do with a design to please and profit the mass of the people. Is it because there is a stronger and more obvious necessity for promoting literature and science among the million, than true reli-

gion? Although there were, that would not justify an *absolute* interdict being placed upon religious truth. Is it because men cannot agree in their opinions upon religion, as they do upon other matters? This answer, which perhaps would be very generally adopted, goes upon the very assumption, whose fallacy we are endeavouring to expose, that, in fact, there is no such thing as religious truth, or if there be men cannot find it—that there is some antagonism or incompatibility between sacred and secular truth, the sinister cause of which lies, not in science, but in Christianity.

Let any one examine the constitution and proceedings of the British Association for the advancement of science, and consider whether or not they involve an unphilosophical divorce between religious truth and other truth. It is impossible not to perceive that all the laws and doings of that great society are founded on the hypothesis, that the page of the Bible and its bearings on human character and conduct and destiny, do not belong to science. If true knowledge, specially its diffusion among mankind, be the object of that noble association, why should it set aside one kind of true knowledge? The assumption on which this procedure is founded may indeed be regarded as so plain and incontrovertible as to need neither statement nor explanation. To impugn it will only provoke a smile in many. Nevertheless it may in fact be one of the most profound and injurious fallacies of the present day.

These suggestions will not appear so strange as they

might otherwise do, if you endeavour to realise the following train of thought. Philosophers have united with poets in expatiating with delight, upon the benefits which men in every age and clime have obtained by holding communion with nature, as well as carefully unfolded the pleasures and advantages to be derived from scientific observation and discovery. Whether we linger in rich meadows teeming with exuberant fruitfulness, or climb the mountain brow to inhale the fresh free air of Heaven, or wander on ocean's shore to listen to the music of its waves, everywhere the mind is impressed with a sense of nature's grandeur, or pleased with its loveliness, or charmed with its variety. The contemplation of nature's beauties suggests to the happy mind many elevating thoughts, while it aids in calming the troubles of a vexed and wearied spirit, as well as soothing and healing the heart which has been broken by affliction. The vigorous pursuit of scientific truth sends a glow of purest delight through the mental framework, and strengthens and develops the intellectual faculties, besides augmenting indirectly by successful investigations the physical well-being of mankind. Thoughtful men have always rejoiced in extracting for themselves such blessings from the study of nature, and in inviting others to seek like precious solace where they themselves have found it. Literature summons all her resources to recommend and disseminate this rational and unalloyed enjoyment. Philosophy adds her august sanction to a frequent participation in this feast of the soul. The Bible withholds not approbation,

but benignantly smiles upon all who partake freely of the ambrosia at nature's banquet.

But granting all this to be true, it is not only a legitimate but necessary inquiry—Is this enjoyment strong and deep enough to meet and remove the uneasiness for which it is often prescribed? Is it rich and abundant enough to satisfy our large desires? The negative answer, which will be universally returned to this question, indicates the existence of a painful phenomenon in all human experience. Philosophy may not, surely, ignore this fact. The learned men who will not give it a place among their studies are obviously under the influence of prejudice or bigotry. How stands the case? There is a fountain of sorrow in every human breast and in every social circle, ever welling up its bitter waters. To sweeten this fountain of wormwood, the only specific that the prevailing philosophy can recommend is communion with nature and the study of science. This remedy, though not unattended with some good effects, is undeniably powerless on the whole and insufficient. If this philosophy then were consistent with her own principles, would she not call loudly and incessantly for the consideration of these ominous facts, namely, the general prevalence in humanity of a virulent disease, and the inefficacy of the most potent remedies which are resorted to in her schools? If this disease, which cannot be concealed, cannot also be cured, then benevolence would weep over the miseries of our race, and her hottest tears would be shed over the failure of the antidotes,

which human wisdom has devised to expel or neutralise the poison of human grief.

Is there, then, another and unfailing antidote to be found? To overlook this enquiry, or to treat it unworthily, as has been done by almost every school in philosophy, is a grave and fundamental error, even judging philosophers on their own principles. If it be asserted on anything like a plausible ground, that there is an effectual remedy for the sorrows of the human heart, is philosophy not bound in self-consistency to take up the assertion, and give some deliverance as to its truth or its falsehood? When an individual, or a school, or an institution of any sort, professes to be philosophical, and does in fact take up and discuss for the pleasure and profit of men innumerable questions on every kind of subject, and all the time is profoundly silent on this one point, the omission, to say the least, is a glaring inconsistency. It really seems to proceed upon the assumption, that there is some deep and secret opposition between one sort of truth and another. If it be indeed a fact, that there is a remedy, and only one, which can heal radically and for ever our aching hearts and dry our burning tears, the self-styled philosophy that continues ignorant of this precious and powerful balm, is more than half-blind; and the philosophy that knows of this remedy, and yet purposely or carelessly conceals its knowledge, — nay, that does not proclaim its existence to the world, and teach its celestial virtues, must be pronounced to be both deceitful and cruel.

Origen.—These are the remarks of one who seems desirous of digging about the deepest roots of infidelity.

Celsus. — But you intimated that you had also some observations to make on the *superstitious* antagonism between one truth and another.

Theologus.—There is undoubtedly a superstitious, as well as a rationalistic, antagonism between reason and religion. While some would exclude Christianity from the pale of philosophy and science, and treat it under that pretext unworthily, others as unwisely acquiescing silently in the propriety of this exclusion, can cling to the Bible and religion, only by cherishing a secret or avowed dislike and suspicion of philosophy, or by making religion, not so much a matter of the understanding and the reason, as of the heart and the affections. For example, it has been said of the Bible: “It appeals not to our logical consciousness, but speaks at once to the religious nature, or, as we more often term it, to the heart.” It would be strange indeed if the Word of God did not speak to our feelings, but it would be equally strange if it did not speak to the feelings through the understanding. The Bible surely speaks to us as intelligent beings, and its appeals are based upon rational grounds. What may be meant by “logical consciousness,” it is perhaps not very easy to determine. Man has but *one faculty* of understanding to be employed on different objects. That the Bible speaks to reason on its practical side, no one will question; and it seems

equally plain that the Word of God ought to be made an object of philosophical study as well as His works. When a philosopher begins to patronize the Christian religion in the style of the above quotation, granting it a sort of special license, as if it were of too delicate a constitution to be tested as everything else is tested, its enlightened friends will protest against such treatment as involving a real indignity.

There is a numerous class of theologians, who, in exposing the depravity of man and exalting the claims of the Bible, virtually undermine the authority of the human understanding on all moral and religious questions. It is unnecessary to quote illustrations of this statement, they are so abundant. The infidel, fully aware of the advantage to be derived from this error on the part of his opponents, has made frequent and effective use of the taunt: "The Christian makes the Bible the judge of reason." It is painful to hear from the pulpit and the press sentiments such as the following, uttered and penned by men who stand high in the Christian world. "Reason has often deceived us but Scripture cannot." "See what comes of reasoning instead of believing." The fallacy involved in such representations is easily made apparent. Men have been misled by *erroneous interpretations* of Scripture as well as by *false arguments*. If it be said, erroneous interpretations are not Scripture; neither are false arguments reason. Apart from the use of his reason, to understand what is fundamental and to prove what is susceptible of proof, man cannot legiti-

mately believe a single proposition. Reason *abused* is plainly the parent of many errors ; reason *rightly used* is the perfection of an intelligent being.

That this error is deeply-seated and widely spread in the Christian community, is apparent in many ways. Nothing is more common than to talk of speculative philosophy as a cause of infidelity. Speculation, doubtless, has given *occasion* to the expression and advocacy of atheistical and irreligious sentiments, and the *abuse* of speculative inquiries has confirmed the prevalence of loose and ungodly principles. But there never was a case in which the cause was more clearly taken for the effect. Infidelity is far more frequently the cause of a false philosophy, than a false philosophy the cause of infidelity. When, therefore, we are told again and again by respectable authors, that philosophical speculation has been co-extensive with civilization, and is not in itself to be regarded as an evil, and are shortly afterwards informed that it is also a cause of infidelity ; this inconsistency, which in certain circumstances might be considered as nothing more than a slip of the pen, seems in the present case to be indicative of a general and inveterate prejudice.

In such ways as these, sacred and secular truth are frequently found in unnatural opposition. Although it is generally admitted in theory, that any clashing between reason and religion is improper and injurious, yet practically and in detail, as we have seen, the claims of both are by no means amicably or righteously adjusted. To

tell some Christians, that the study of philosophy embraces Christianity as it embraces other objects, would excite their direst fears and provoke their hottest jealousy. To tell some philosophers, that their philosophy is partial and defective, unless it make them humble, self-denying, heavenly-minded disciples of Jesus, would awaken their bitterest scorn. To tell some pious people, that there is a science of religion, and that to study it would make them better Christians, and to tell some scientists that their science is inconsistent unless it be crowned with evangelical piety, is to expose oneself to a cross-fire from superstitious and secular bigotry. To assert that Christianity has not a stronger foundation to rest upon than any of the sciences, will seem to some a profane attempt to shake the very pillars of religious faith. While, on the other hand, to insinuate that science has not a more rational or more certain conclusion to teach than such as these: "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him," "The friendship of the world is enmity with God,"—will appear to others an enthusiastic attempt to drive reason from her throne. Notwithstanding all the prejudices of unbelieving reason and of unenlightened faith, the Bible is an object with which reason must deal as it deals with everything else. The word of God must be entered in the inventory of the inductive sciences; it must be examined and tested by suitable instruments and methods, as the human mind examines and tests all other things; and its solemn and precious statements are to be received with the reverence

demanding by a message from the Most High, because the volume itself is first received with the confidence due to the deductions of reason. While we thus trace the stream of knowledge to its fountain-head, we find that every doctrine of science, and every doctrine of religion, is equally authoritative and equally reasonable.

Superstitious
amalgamation of
sacred and se-
cular truth.

Celsus.—You also spoke of the amalgamation, as well as the antagonism, of sacred and secular truth, and of those who *superstitiously* merge the latter in the former.

Theologus.—In the days of mediæval darkness, which have been called the stationary period of the inductive sciences, the minds of meditative men were disposed to regard the spheres of theology and of natural philosophy as identical. Their knowledge of nature was very imperfect, and their methods of investigation and reasoning were loose and inconclusive; hence it is not surprising, that they fell into the error of supposing, that all science is to be found in the word of God,—that the Bible is not only true, but contains *all truth*,—that it not only announces a message of mercy, but unfolds the mystery of nature. The prevalent opinion was thus expressed by Scotus: true philosophy is true religion, and true religion is true philosophy. The injurious influence of this error was considerable. The ancient dogmas of philosophy, which had remained unquestioned for many centuries, were covered from assault under the ægis of divine authority; while every discovery was branded as a pestilent heresy. To doubt the teaching of Aristotle

was equivalent to disputing the inspiration of Paul, and the popular language of the word of God was adduced, to justify an anathema against the true theory of the motion of the heavenly bodies. This error led by a sort of reaction to the strange assertion, that what is philosophically true may be theologically false.

A similar error is frequently met with in the present day. There are certain matters, such as geology and moral philosophy, which are common property to the inspired volume and to the book of nature, or, in other words, on which we have information both in the written, and in the unwritten, revelation of God. Now it is the practice of some minds to set aside the information which we have from one of these sources, and crudely and erroneously to generalise the information derived from the other source. The Bible is thus misinterpreted, and hastily pledged to views which it does not sanction. Whenever an attempt is made, however, to examine and digest the information of the unwritten revelation, and to bring it into harmony with the statements of the Word, immediately a cry of heresy and impiety is raised in certain quarters, because old prejudices are assailed and cherished errors exposed.

Rationalistic
amalgamation of
secular and sa-
cred truth

Origen.—But is religious truth never merged into secular truth with an infidel tendency?

Theologus.—Undoubtedly. Many who laugh at their forefathers for resolving natural science into Christianity, are rushing into the opposite extreme,

and resolving Christianity into natural science. Their knowledge of the Bible is so meagre and shallow, that it is not very wonderful to find them fancying that true religion is contained in the enlarged and accurate sciences of our day,—that modern philosophy is the only successful expounder of mysteries,—that it has so improved the habits of society and increased social comfort, that mankind need no other rule of life,—that in the deductions of reason, unaided by written revelation, are to be found the essence and the cream of all theology. These opinions are openly avowed by a few who say, that science is the providence of life. They form, however, the cherished and guiding principle of many more, who would perhaps blush to avow them.

To neglect or mystify the facts of nature, by a summary and unfair reference to the statements of Scripture, was the folly of mediæval sophists, and is still a delusion of many pious people; to neglect or nullify the statements of Holy Scripture, by inordinate devotion to the study of nature, is the heresy of modern philosophy. Implicitly to receive *antique* philosophic dogmas, and attach to them the authority of written revelation, is the grievous mistake of many now as of the scholastic doctors of old; implicitly to receive the lessons of religion inculcated in youth, and then to confound them with, or to merge them in, the conclusions of *modern* science, is the fatal error of many of our accomplished savans. Numbers still are the disciples of the monks, in disregarding or distorting nature, out of a professed deference to the words of inspiration; many of our learned

men are disregarding or distorting divine declarations, out of a pretended deference to philosophy. The dreaming, drowsy ascetics of the past—and the race is far from being extinct—flattered themselves that the Bible was the only reservoir of science ; the eager, active scientists of the present are not unfrequently persuading themselves that their discoveries are the most satisfactory interpretation of the Bible,—or something better. Centuries ago the monks would not study nature as they studied the Bible, and they have still many followers ; there are thousands now who have never studied the Bible with the zest, the patience, and the vigour, which they have expended on some domain of nature.

Men may reach the same quagmire by different and even opposite roads. We can suppose two men agreeing professedly in the statement, that all organized beings are animals. But it may turn out on examination that the one allows those beings only who possess the power of locomotion to be organized ; while the other allows those beings who are destitute of this power to be animals. So by unduly magnifying the place and the claims of Christianity, or by depreciating science, men may come to believe that every truth is a part of religion ; by which they mean, that they cannot be pious and devout without being at the same time adepts in science. Again, by erroneously magnifying the position and importance of science, or by depreciating Christianity, men may come likewise to believe that every truth is a part of religion ; by which they mean, that the student of science cannot but be an acceptable worshipper of God.

DIALOGUE III.

BELIEF AND RESPONSIBILITY.

Celsus.—The fundamental assertion of Christianity, that man is to be saved by faith, bears an absurdity on the face of it.

Origen.—How so?

Celsus.—Because our belief, as we have just seen, is always, or ought always to be, based upon knowledge, and our understanding is not under our control; for we must judge of any matter just as it appears to us at the time to be.

Origen.—Our reason is certainly not *directly* under our control; but very little consideration will shew that it is under our power, to some extent at least, *indirectly*. We can examine a matter, or refuse to examine it, at our pleasure. Besides, we may examine it in two very different ways, with prejudice or without prejudice. Surely, then, we are responsible for the manner in which we use our intelligence; and, consequently, we are responsible for our belief.

Celsus.—If this reasoning proves anything at all, it proves that man is responsible for *all* his beliefs, for one as well as for another.

Origen.—I cannot go the length of saying, that man is responsible for all his beliefs.

Celsus.—Why not? How, then, do you distinguish between those beliefs for which you are responsible, and those for which you are not responsible?

Origen.—"Our opinions, in so far as they are influenced by our dispositions, our beliefs, in so far as they are controlled by our inclination, are legitimate subjects of responsibility."¹

Celsus.—You cannot mention a single belief, that may not at one time or another be controlled by our inclination.

Origen.—Our belief in mathematical truth is not.

Celsus.—Many a youth has crossed the *pons asinorum*, because he was influenced by the ambition of excelling, or the desire of obtaining a prize, who otherwise would never have mastered the proposition referred to, or intelligently believed its conclusion.

Origen.—"Inclination has nothing whatever to do in believing that two and two make four, or that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles. A man in his senses could not believe otherwise. But inclination has much to do in receiving or rejecting moral and religious truth."²

Celsus.—Indeed! Pray what has inclination to do with believing that it is wrong to steal, or that it is right for the child to honour his father and his mother? Can men in their senses believe otherwise?

¹ Infidelity, by Pearson, p. 269.

² *Ib.* p. 269.

Theologus.—Unless the distinction be made clearly out between our responsible and irresponsible beliefs, the assertion of such a distinction will undoubtedly favour and promote that “weakened sense of responsibility,” that “utter absence of anything like the religious obligation of belief,” which are asserted¹ to be characteristics of infidel “indifferentism.”

Origen.—We effectually expose that indifferentism by maintaining that “Reason and Scripture unite their testimonies, in establishing the position, that responsibility is in proportion to the means of information and the weight and clearness of evidence.”²

Celsus.—This criterion applies equally well to any one belief as to any other. If a man is to be blamed for neglecting or perverting evidence or information on one question, why not on another question? You must, therefore, cease to hold us responsible for what you are pleased to call our disbelief, till you hold yourselves responsible for *all* your beliefs. We have reason to throw back upon yourselves the taunt, that you have pointed against others: “the doctrine of responsibility, in its high import, is either denied, or fluctuating and feeble.”³

Origen.—The truth for which we contend may be stated in another form. “So far as false opinion arises from the influences of the conduct upon the mind, it is unquestionable that man must be responsible for it.”⁴

Celsus.—Does *conduct* here include *inclination*, as

¹ Infidelity, by Pearson, p. 253.

² Ib. 276.

³ Ib. p. 286.

⁴ Christian Theism, vol. ii. pp. 372, 373.

given in your former statement? In that statement, did inclination include conduct? May we not complain of looseness in the expression of your fundamental position? But passing that, we are as far from a settlement of the question as ever. Is every false opinion found to arise from the influence of bad conduct on the mind? And if not, how shall we distinguish those that arise in this manner from those that do not so arise?

Origen.—This is metaphysical quibbling.

Celsus.—It is no such thing. It is a most momentous practical question, at least in your estimation. You affirm that I am responsible for my belief. Your affirmation is worthless, unless you maintain that you and I are responsible for all our beliefs, or shew me by some plain mark, for which of my beliefs I am responsible, and for which of them I am not responsible.

Origen.—"Man cannot justly be punished for what is not dependent upon the will, and it is true that the reception of truth or error is seldom immediately dependent upon it."¹

Celsus.—This is a good specimen of the vague mistiness, in which the author you quote indulges, and especially on some of the most momentous questions. If this be his ultimatum on the question before us, nothing can be more unsatisfactory. It is a mere truism to say that "man cannot justly be punished for what is not dependent upon the will;" unless indeed it be at variance with your doctrine of original sin. As to his other remark,

¹ Christian Theism, vol. ii. p. 373.

nothing could be more beautifully indefinite, or palpably false. It certainly implies, that the reception of truth or error is sometimes *immediately* dependent upon the will;—an assertion made by no other writer of any name. The general import of the remark is, that we are responsible for some beliefs and not for others;—a shallow reiteration of this “glorious uncertainty.”

Origen.—Stay now, I think I can answer your question. “That arduous responsibility which attaches to man, . . . is at once relieved, and effectually relieved, by the maxim—the key-stone of ethical truth—that only voluntary error condemns us;—that all we are really responsible for, is a faithful, honest, patient investigation and weighing of evidence, as far as our abilities and opportunities admit, and a conscientious pursuit of what we honestly deem truth, wherever it may lead us.”¹

Celsus.—In the first place, this does not meet my demand. It amounts to this. I am responsible for voluntary errors, and not for involuntary errors; which seems to come to no more than this tautology: I am responsible for the errors for which I am responsible. In the second place, the statement is one quite to our liking. If after “a faithful, honest, patient investigation and weighing of evidence,” I come to a conclusion, believing it to be true, while, notwithstanding, it is really erroneous, how can I be sure that in any case I know the truth? In asserting that there is such a thing as this involuntary

¹ Reason and Faith, p. 22.

error, how do you know that you are not in an involuntary error in making the assertion? Error that is involuntary is, of course, as sages have long affirmed, invincible. For ought that you can tell, your belief in Christianity may be an invincible and involuntary error.

Theologus.—The doctrine of involuntary and invincible error undoubtedly implies, that a man may be in error on any point whatever without any possibility of his escaping from it, or of knowing that he is entangled in it. To know that we are in an error, is in fact to be free from that error. If this doctrine, then, be “the keystone of ethical truth,” the edifice will be nothing better than “the baseless fabric of a vision.”

Origen.—In maintaining, as you have
 Human depravity. been doing, Mr Umpire, the validity of the human understanding, and in now denying the existence of involuntary error, what becomes of the doctrine of original sin and the depravity of man?

Theologus.—In denying the validity of the human understanding, you deny the responsibility of man,—you represent his understanding not merely as darkened, but as utterly destroyed. If you do away with man’s responsibility, you annihilate both original and actual sin. Again, in maintaining the culpability of error in *every* instance, we are driven by logical necessity to the doctrine of original sin; whereas by admitting the common philosophical dogma of invincible and involuntary error, we must either affirm the blamelessness of error, or cast the blame of it from the creature upon the Creator.

Celsus.—We have always felt that Christians, in denying the veracity of reason or the trustworthiness of the understanding, were fighting with us at an enormous disadvantage. The very weapon they wield breaks in their grasp. Besides, our doctrine of Pantheism needs no better defence, than the ancient and universal belief in involuntary and invincible error. In our estimation it is “the key-stone of ethical truth;” that is, of all that you can ever expect to get as ethical truth.

Origen.—You deny, then, the moral inability of fallen man, as distinguished from physical inability.¹

Celsus.—Your assertion of this distinction is an awkward attempt to save yourself from the pantheistic conclusion involved in your own principles. One of your friends says, “Nor does the necessitarian appear to have any escape from a semi-pantheism, in the distinction between physical and moral necessity. It would be more consistent with the facts of life, to speak of chains of immoral necessity.”²

Theologus.—If the moral necessity under which man as a fallen creature is represented as lying, or his moral inability, or whatever else it may be called, involve irresponsibility, man’s nature is destroyed. If this moral inability involve blameworthiness, the doctrine of original sin is conceded, including in it man’s responsibility for *all* his beliefs. What is called moral inability has no meaning that we can perceive, unless it imply irresponsibility on

¹ See Infidelity, p. 266.

² Christian Theism, v. i. p. 197.

the one hand, or guilt on the other. If it imply irresponsibility, there is no retreat from the slough of pantheism. And if it involve culpability, to call it inability or necessity, or any such name, is a pure contradiction, and leads to endless confusion.

Origen.—Granting that a man is responsible for all his beliefs, so far as they are the result of his own personal free agency, how can you maintain that we are responsible for erroneous beliefs, which are the result of the free agency of our forefathers?

Celsus.—If you deny that you are held responsible for your erroneous beliefs in which you are entangled in consequence of the sins of your progenitors, pray what do you mean by the famous doctrine of original sin and human depravity?

Origen.—But you cannot hold a man responsible in the same degree, or to the same extent, for hereditary errors, as for errors into which he has led himself?

Celsus.—On your own principles you cannot deny his responsibility for both sorts of error; and the distinction between greater and lesser sins is a sorry refuge for a man who professes to believe in the Bible. Thus it appears that our creed, that we are not responsible for our belief at all, is about as reasonable and far more consistent than the Christian's creed, that he is responsible for some, and not for others, of his beliefs.

Theologus.—But if you maintain that you are in no sense or degree responsible for your belief, you exclude from the sphere of responsibility the most important

function of your nature, you eviscerate the distinction between truth and error of all meaning, you take refuge in a self-immolating scepticism, to reason with which is utter folly. But what objections do you urge to the statement, that man is responsible for all his beliefs?

Celsus.—To admit this, and then think of the numerous and serious errors of mankind, is more than enough to make me wish that man had never existed.

Origen.—Man *does* exist, and the problems involved in his existence must be discussed. Your views, Mr Umpire, are totally at variance with the Christian doctrine of the influences of the Holy Spirit.

Theologus. — The doctrines of the Spirit's work and man's degeneracy have generally been regarded as correlative, so that whatever views enhance the one, in the same degree, enhance the other. And we have already noticed how human depravity is virtually denied, by refusing either the validity of the human understanding or the responsibility of man for every one of his beliefs.

Origen.—But if reason never deceive us, and if we by our own strength can avoid or escape from every wrong belief, what room is there for the gracious work of the Divine Spirit?

Theologus. — When we speak of "our own strength," we do not mean, nor have we ever said, that it is our own strength independent of Divine assistance. Nothing has been advanced by us to exclude the necessity of that Divine Agent aiding and guiding us in searching for the

truth, and strengthening us to act according to the truth.

Acting as we believe. *Origen.*—Do you mean to affirm, that it is possible for a man to know and believe the truth, and yet not act upon it?

Celsus.—If you grant me that a man always acts on his belief,—always does in his conduct just as he believes in his heart,—and that his belief is, we know not how frequently, involuntary, I shall construct as nice a system of Pantheism as any of the most popular projects of the day.

Theologus.—What *is* sin? my friend.

Origen.—Sin is any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God.

Theologus.—Very well. The transgressor of the law knows and believes what the law is when he transgresses it, or he does not. If he knows the law in transgressing it, he acts contrary to his knowledge or belief. If he does not know the law which he transgresses, he must have been made in that condition, or he must have brought himself into it. He could not have been made in that condition. Hence we are led to this conclusion, that acting contrary to one's knowledge or belief is *direct* guilt, or presumptuous sin, and acting according to abnormal knowledge or erroneous belief is *indirect* guilt, or a sin of ignorance.

Celsus.—If, then, amid an elaborate description of Infidelity in all its forms and causes, no express mention be made of man's acting contrary to his knowledge and

belief, we have a tolerably good scheme of Pantheism under a Christian guise. For if wickedness and irreligion be nothing more than erroneous belief, and may always be resolved into it, and if erroneous belief be, we know not when, involuntary and invincible, then it follows, that error and wickedness are the natural and necessary developments of the Deity.

Theologus.—We are sorry to observe that this remark applies to a book under the name of “Infidelity,” to which frequent reference has been made in this discussion. Indeed we know of no book in defence of Christianity, in which it is maintained as the foundation of the argument, that men may act contrary to their belief, and in doing so incur guilt, and that all erroneous beliefs are culpable, as the consequents of presumptuous sin. Unless these principles be assumed, tacitly or avowedly, there seems to us to be no escape from pantheism.

Origen.—But in your zeal to escape pantheism, do not reject Christianity. The Bible teaches us the necessity of the Holy Spirit’s work on the hearts of men, but there can be no necessity for this work, if, as you affirm, the validity of the human understanding be admitted, and the ability of man to escape, or keep away, from all erroneous sentiments.

Theologus.—You affirm the culpability of the man who does not believe in Christ, or who believes that Christ is not his Saviour, and you acknowledge that it is through the help of the Divine Spirit alone that any man believes in the Saviour. Very well, then, if your assertion re-

garding one erroneous belief that it is culpable does not, on your own admission, interfere with the Spirit's agency, how does the assertion that *every* erroneous belief is culpable, interfere with the necessity of the Spirit's work to lead us into all truth?

Origen.—"It is the doctrine of Holy Scripture, that the deeds of men are acceptable to God, only when their motives originate in a Divine influence"¹—"the mind has no power of virtuous action but through Divine influence."²

Theologus.—If by Divine influence you mean, the influence of the Creator on the creature, by which we live and move and have our being, then without this influence men have no power of vicious action even, as well as no power of virtuous action. If by Divine influence you mean that gracious influence which is the purchase of Christ's atonement, then you must mean what have been called, the *common*, or the *saving*, influences of the Spirit. If you mean the Spirit's common operations, your statement is not true. If you mean the *saving* operations of the Holy Spirit, your mode of expression is not very precise. Taken in any way, your assertion is certainly not available in the present argument, unless you mean to state, that the grace of the Spirit is always irresistible, that there is no such sin as grieving and quenching the Divine Spirit, and that those who are destitute of this influence are irresponsible and guiltless.

¹ Christian Theism, vol. i. p. 198

² *Ib.* p. 263.

Celsus.—It seems to me a self-evident truth, that where there is no power of virtuous action, there can be no power of vicious action. I am at a loss to perceive the consistency of the author just quoted, when I compare the sentiments of his already given with such as those that follow: “What can be expected when moral training is withheld, and moral power denied, under the pernicious notion, that they can be of no use, till God’s time shall come; to shed some extraordinary effusion of Divine light within the heart, which shall overpower the vicious affections, and constrain the finite will by Sovereign Grace?”¹ How can “moral power” be more expressly “denied,” than by the assertion that there is “no power of virtuous action but through Divine influence?”

Theologus.—The only way to steer clear of such contradictions is to carry along with us the very important principle, that the *mode* of the Divine agency in conversion (and also in miracles, prophecy, and inspiration) is altogether unknown to us, and consequently always involves a mystery; but that this agency leaves the mind of man to act according to its own laws without interference or disturbance, being simply something added or given to the individual which he immediately assimilates. “The supernatural ever bases itself on the natural.”

Celsus.—Christians in attempting to refute the various forms of infidelity, as they say, tell us, “that *responsibility remains indestructible amid all objections from*

¹ Christian Theism, vol. ii. p. 394.

original temperament and external influences."¹ Now they so represent the doctrine of original sin by making it subversive of the veracity of reason, and the doctrine of grace as it is called, by making it subversive of our moral power, as to cause both of these, the one an original temperament and the other an external influence, to destroy our responsibility.

Theologus.—We saw that the doctrine of original sin has no meaning, unless we receive both the validity of the understanding and the culpability of every erroneous belief. It may now be remarked, that if there be some shew of reason in denying both of these positions in regard to heathens and men destitute of the promise and presence of the Holy Spirit, it appears to be utterly untenable to deny them in regard to Christians. If it be inadmissible to suppose an *idolater* so utterly degraded and lost, that in an honest effort to distinguish between truth and error, he cannot be sure but that he may be wrong, how much less can this be supposed to be the state of a man who is "regenerated," "created anew," "enlightened," and "led" by the Spirit of God, the Spirit of truth? If the erroneous beliefs entertained by the savage and the cannibal must be considered culpable and blameworthy, especially if we adhere to the tenet of hereditary corruption and guilt, how can we hesitate about the guilt of the erroneous beliefs held by Christians, whose boast and privilege it is to possess the word of God, which "is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for

¹ Infidelity, p. 278.

correction, for instruction in righteousness ; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works?" The Spirit is given to help our infirmities, to rectify and restore our nature to its primitive integrity and beauty ; surely, then, even although the case of the pagan were given up, the case of the Christian might be different. If we do not know assuredly right from wrong, can it be said that sanctification has begun? If our erroneous beliefs, *all of them*, are not to be purged away, what does the sanctifying process consist of? Is it a mere physical cleansing, or is it partial and incomplete?

Sincerity. *Origen.*—Do you then deny the sincerity of the infidel? for we never thought of going so far as this.

Celsus.—When you admit our sincerity, it is done in such a way as to be a very equivocal compliment.

Origen.—How so?

Celsus.—Because you admit it in form, and virtually deny it.

Origen.—Can anything be more explicit than such a statement as this: "As to what is written or spoken ingenuously and sincerely, or as we say 'in good faith,' with the avowed intention to loosen or subvert Religious Belief, I will never call the author of such utterances my enemy."¹ Hear the same author's meaning which he attaches to sincerity, when he speaks of "our modern sense of the stern obligation of religious sincerity;"² or,

¹ Restoration of Belief, p. 9.

² *Ib.* p. 81.

again, when he speaks of the "marked simplicity, grave sincerity, and quietness of tone,"¹ in which "the early Christian writers" speak of Christ, their Lord. Elsewhere the same writer says: "I shall impute no bad motives to you as a cover to my chagrin in finding that I do not bring you over to my side: I shall not tell you that your resistance to my reasoning is nothing but an immoral obduracy, springing from the corrupt wishes of an unregenerate heart."²

Celsus.—But what value is to be placed on the import of the word sincerity, when in the same volume we read of "the sincere idealist,"³ who is not unlikely to slide off from the path of morality, of "sincere gainsayers,"⁴ and of "sincere but unstable souls, wont to beguile themselves."⁵ In one place, indeed, he supposes himself to be addressing "a reasonable and ingenuous opponent;"⁶ and in another place, remarks: that "candour is sorely tried in supposing that educated men are honest when they put forth what is so frivolous, so captious, and so nugatory, as that which they advance in behalf of their disbelief. I converse with those who profess this disbelief, and instead of rigid argumentation—serious in its tone, and ingenuous—I am met by a style of reasoning which is unanswerable, only because it is vague, misty, evasive, and sentimental."⁷

Theologus.—It is obvious that the meaning of the words sincere, ingenuous, and so forth, is by no means

¹ Restoration of Belief, p. 107.

² Ib. p. 114.

³ Ib. p. 148.

⁴ Ib. p. 23.

⁵ Ib. p. 163.

⁶ Ib. p. 239.

⁷ Ib. p. 340.

fixed. To say the least, it is perplexing to find great weight placed in the Christian argument upon the sincerity of the martyrs, and to find the same quality of mind freely granted to the rejecters of Christianity.

Celsus.—When we are told that “no one who, in a spirit of industry and honesty, would inform himself concerning the ‘Evidences of Christianity,’ the ‘authenticity and genuineness of the Gospels and Epistles,’ or any kindred subjects, need be at a loss in finding books, learnedly and conclusively written, where he may meet with more than enough of proof and argument to satisfy every seriously-minded and educated reader,”¹—when we are spoken of in this strain in one place, to suppose in another place the case of an ingenuous opponent, or a sincere unbeliever, seems to justify the charge of fanaticism and hypocrisy which has sometimes been brought against Christians.

Theologus.—Had we not better endeavour to settle the meaning of sincerity?

Celsus.—A writer of some eminence has said, that it means one of two things. It may mean honesty and consistency in expressing and maintaining our opinion; or again, it may mean diligence and candour in forming our opinion. To allow that we are sincere in the first sense is a poor compliment; to allow that we are sincere in the second sense is fatal to the exclusive claims of Christianity. We could multiply proofs to shew how we are

¹ Restoration of Belief, p. 23; also 219, 257.

in name allowed to be sincere, while the reality is denied to us.

Theologus.—The distinction which you have mentioned in the two meanings of the word sincere, and such like words, is very clear and very important. The first meaning, or guilelessness and simplicity in expressing our views, can have little to do with the present discussion. But it is a most vital question, can a man be sincere, that is, thoroughly honest and laborious, (not in holding, but) in adopting and forming an erroneous judgment?

Celsus.—Many of our friends, holding that Christianity is not true, cannot regard Christians as sincere in embracing it. And many more of them, beholding so many Christians not only insincere, as they think, in embracing it, but also inconsistent in holding it, are tempted to regard the whole as a delusion and a cheat.

Origen.—But you would never “make sincerity or earnestness the test of truth and moral greatness.”¹

Sincerity the test
of truth.

Celsus.—In making this assertion, you virtually give up the position that he who honestly and diligently seeks to know the truth respecting Christianity will find it to be true, and you contradict yourself when you trace infidelity, both speculative and practical, in all its forms, and in each case “to the same moral cause—the repugnance in human nature to what is purely spiritual and divinely authoritative.”² We lay no claim to the sincerity and earnestness, which

¹ Infidelity, p. 67.

² *Ib.* p. 333.

do not exclude a repugnance to what is spiritual and divine. If *that* is the sincerity which you allow to us, we do not regard it as a compliment, but as an insult. And if others attribute *that sincerity* to Christians, what right have you to complain?

Origen.—When we appeal to the sincerity of the primitive Christians and martyrs, in proof of the truth of their testimony, it is to be remembered, that “the matter in relation to which their evidence is adduced was one to be resolved, not by the understanding, but by the senses.”

Celsus.—In the first place, we observe in reply to this statement, the senses without the aid of the understanding can resolve no question; in the second place, it implies that the senses do not deceive us, but that our understanding may deceive us; and in the third place, it implies that there can be no true martyrdom, unless in relation to a matter which can be resolved solely by the senses.

Origen.—Our position may be stated in another form. We believe the facts recorded by the writers of the New Testament, on account of the undoubted sincerity of these writers, that is, “because hostile criticism hath hitherto failed in shaking their character, either in respect of their conscientiousness—of their *meaning* to tell the truth—or in respect of their competency—of their having within reach the materials of truth, and being qualified to form a correct judgment of it.”

Celsus.—It seems to me that if you controvert a man's

opinion, or judgment, on any question whatever,—if you affirm to be true, what he affirms to be false, or *vice versa*, it is sheer absurdity to suppose that both of you are equally competent and conscientious, in so far, at least, as that particular question is concerned. Do you admit the conscientiousness and competency of the pantheist, so far as he is a pantheist?

Origen.—Why, no. For “pantheism expresses the astonishment of reason to see nature separate from God. It is the speculation of the soul which ought to be one with the Eternal, but is robbed of the Divine Treasure, and cannot realise her loss,”¹

Celsus.—But you are yourself a pantheist; unless you mean what you have not very precisely expressed, namely, that the soul is not robbed by another, but *robs herself* of the Divine treasure, and *will not*, rather than cannot, realise her loss. What, then, can you mean by saying, that the author of “The vestiges of the Natural History of Creation,” is “sincere” in “making a constant and reverent profession of theism;”² or how can you maintain, that Blanco White treated the question between supernaturalism and rationalism with much closeness of reasoning, and “with perfect sincerity,” while yet there is “a great mistake at the foundation of his arguments.”³

Theologus.—It is plain that a man’s error on any point must be traced directly to his want of competency or of

¹ Christian Theism, vol. i. p. 204.

² *Ib.* p. 112.

³ *Ib.* vol. ii. p. 204; compare pp. 376, 378, 396, 414.

conscientiousness in respect to that point. He who is in error must be so, because he cannot, or because he will not see it. To talk then of a "sincere mistake" is nonsense.

Origen.—But do you deny that there are sincere Roman Catholics, who may be saved, in spite of the errors of their pernicious system?

Theologus.—God forbid, that I should doom any man to wrath, or affirm that no adherent of an apostate church can be saved. I do not believe that there is such a thing as "a sincere papist," or a sincere errorist of any kind. To examine a question with competency and conscientiousness, and yet call light darkness—it is impossible. But a man may be sincere on one point, and be destitute of that sincerity on another point. And a *sincere Christian*, though entangled among many of the errors of popery, will be saved.

Origen.—But may we not speak of the grievous errors held by an individual, and "decline to speculate" "from what cause proceeding" in his case? "I am no judge of the heart, and do not wish to judge it."¹

Celsus.—But your friends often speculate about the cause of infidelity, and proceed, I presume, upon the principle, that when the cause is found it applies to individual cases. Those again who in words decline the speculation, carry it out in reality. The very author you refer to, says, on the next page but one, "I knew, indeed, that it was possible for a man hastily to adopt and

¹ A Defence of the Eclipse of Faith, p. 7.

abandon any opinions, if he took but half of a seventh of a tenth of a thirteenth of a survey of the evidence; but here I could not find that there was any survey of evidence at all." And yet we are to believe that he declines to speculate as to the cause of a grievous error in any individual case!

Origen.—Well, well; I act on the principle of imputing no ill motives,¹ and even in the use of ridicule of leaving motives untouched.²

Celsus.—Of course, to complain of our "acrimony and petulance,"³ and "presumptuous jargon"⁴ and so forth, is not imputing ill motives!

Origen.—All this is carping at incidental expressions.

Celsus.—Well, then, taking up the matter in its broad outlines, how can any man who opposes the true religion be sincere, if "the evidence which substantiates any *true* theory of religion must be, at least, tolerably appreciable by every man who sincerely examines it."⁵

Origen.—But, then, everybody believes that "the genuine sceptic" is distinguished by "a love of doubt itself,—a prejudice in *favour* of the '*nothing true*;' "⁶ and that "if there be such a thing as a *bona fide* atheist—who is not also mad, argument with him, in any shape, is a very hopeless sort of an affair."⁷

¹ A Defence of the Eclipse of Faith, p. 16.

² *Ib.* p. 27.

³ *Ib.* p. 21.

⁴ *Ib.* p. 43; see also pp. 61, 62, 120, 133, 139.

⁵ *Ib.* p. 149, *et alibi*, 188, 228.

⁶ Edinburgh Review, No. 193. Genius and Writings of Descartes, p. 9.

⁷ *Ib.* p. 40.

Celsus.—It is obvious, then, that if, as you say, the true Christian is distinguished from the formalist by his sincere love of truth, and the genuine sceptic by his sincere love of doubt, and the *bona fide* atheist by his sincere madness, the ordinary unbeliever cannot be sincere in any sense.

Theologus.—But has no case been alleged, in which an individual is in error, neither through incompetency nor unconscientiousness?

Origen.—I have just laid my hands on one. “The predisposition to find everywhere the germs of the yet future sensational schools in Locke as their fountain head, often leads M. Cousin, as we cannot but think, into extreme injustice to our great countryman. This we are far from attributing to any unworthy spirit of depreciation, for M. Cousin often gives frank expression to his admiration of Locke’s sagacity and genius. As little can we impute it to ignorance, for he has evidently studied the great work of Locke diligently, and cites him profusely.”¹

Celsus.—Ah, well; how is this extreme injustice to be accounted for, if it can be traced neither to ignorance nor to an unworthy spirit? Does not such an opinion savour of Pantheism?

Origen.—This is the way in which it is accounted for :

¹ Edinburgh Review, No. 202. Locke’s Character and Philosophy, p. 411. See A Defence, &c., pp. 233, 234, where the author approves of the two articles in the Edinburgh Review from which we quote.

“we can attribute it only to what is but too apt to adhere to the critic and historian of philosophy—the spirit of system. Having laid it down that the roots of the sensational schools were to be found in Locke’s writings, he unconsciously perverts or exaggerates whatsoever seems to favour that hypothesis.”¹

Celsus.—What a poor innocent a critic and historian of philosophy is, according to this statement. The fact that he is too apt to adhere to a spirit of system leads him to commit extreme injustice, while all the time there is no ignorance (not to say, no error), in his mind on the matter in hand, and no improper desire in his heart. We are told that he perverts and exaggerates *unconsciously*. The defence can only be complete by asserting, that in “laying it down that the roots of the sensational schools were to be found in Locke’s writings,” he did so *unconsciously*, and that he was *sincerely* unconscious. Here, then, we have a case of extreme injustice, of which no one is *guilty*. If Pantheism consist in the destruction or relaxation of responsibility, as you affirm, what is this?

Theologus.—If there be a great deal of infidelity, in “a want of stern fidelity to doctrines” which are “theoretically admitted,”² there is plainly some need to recast certain portions of the Christian argument, as well as to reform certain parties in the Christian church.

Origen.—If men be, indeed, responsible for *all* their beliefs, it will scarcely be true, that the great problem

¹ Edinburgh Review, No. 202. Locke’s Character and Philosophy, p. 411.

² Infidelity, p. 251.

of the Religious Obligation of Belief was solved for us by the martyrs of the primitive church.

Theologus.—We cannot estimate too highly the advantages that have flowed from their practical and powerful exemplification of the principle; but it is a very different thing to suppose that, till then, it was unknown, or that now it is fully understood.

Origen.—You do not allow, therefore,
Law of conscience. that the “great Law of Conscience” has been “defined,” and that it is it “which places the modern mind in so great an advance beyond the ancient mind.”¹

Theologus.—To suppose that the Law of Conscience was both originated and perfected by the early martyr church, is to degrade the ancient world beneath the level of responsibility, and to elevate modern and mediæval Christians higher than they deserve.

Celsus.—I have not been able, even yet, to find any where a definition of the Law of Conscience.

Origen.—So you never heard the text of Scripture: “We ought to obey God rather than men.”

Celsus.—Have you never heard of its contradictory interpretations or applications?

Origen.—It is plain beyond dispute, that no one ought to be punished by the civil magistrate for his conscientious opinions.

Celsus.—If it be the conscientious opinion of the civil magistrate that he should punish some of his subjects for holding an opinion which they regard as conscientious,

¹ Restoration, p. 79.

what is to be done? Is the conscience of the magistrate to overbear the conscience of his subject? Or is the conscience of the subject to overmaster that of the throne? Or are the two consciences to be in everlasting conflict, or in a state of equilibrium, the one exactly balancing the other?

Origen.—Nothing can sustain uninjured such metaphysical manipulation.

Theologus.—The questions are most relevant and fair. They bring us to the same conclusion to which the other parts of the discussion lead, namely, that a really conscientious judgment will be a true one. If men plead conscience, when conscience has not been consulted, they act with insincerity and disingenuousness. If conscience be really consulted, if men seek the truth sincerely, that is, with honesty and diligence, they will not err. Two honest consciences, therefore, cannot come into collision. And the Law of Conscience is not liberty to think as we choose, or to suspend the arm of the magistrate by the plea of conscience, but liberty to think truly, to form our judgments in accordance with truth. No conscience is at liberty to believe error. No man can deliberately adopt error without deceiving himself.

Origen.—Is sincerity, then, a test of truth?

Theologus.—Unquestionably.

Origen.—Is a man's dying in attestation of his sincerity in holding a certain opinion, sufficient evidence of his sincerity?

Theologus.—Generally it will be so; but it cannot be affirmed universally.

Origen. — There may have been martyrs for a false religion on that supposition.

Theologus. — The principles stated allow, we think, the possibility of such an event. But when the character of the martyr is properly defined, nothing can be more erroneous or deleterious than the loose way of speaking in which many indulge, allowing every religious system to have its martyrs. A martyr accurately conceived of, is one who lays down his life rather than renounce his belief, even while the option is before him to renounce it and live. We are not aware of any well authenticated case of such a sort of martyrdom, except in connection with Christianity.

Origen. — Is such a martyrdom proof positive of the truth of the martyr's belief?

Theologus. — It is a strong presumption. It is not absolute proof, not because sincerity is not a test of truth, but because even a voluntary submission to death may occur through opinionativeness or pride.

Origen. — What room can there be for
 Charity. the exercise of charity, if we assume that every man that is in error is insincere?

Celsus. — What room is there for the exercise of charity between your party and ours, if the following statement, or such as it, be admitted. "In a manner which is perfectly conspicuous, and which no man of clear intellect can misunderstand, the religious controversy of this passing time is bearing us forward toward a single issue. The alternative, the only alternative now

in front of the cultured branches of the human family, is this—Christianity or Atheism. One feels that this alternative, and nothing short of it, is near in front of us, because, on the one side, those many ill-judged and crazy schemes for effecting a compromise with infidelity, which of late have been propounded by intelligent Christian men, all carry upon them the indications of their origin in faltering belief, in mistaken discretion, and in confusedness of brain. We may be sure that no such slender devices as these can have power to check that mighty movement to which we are all of us committed, or can save us from its issue. On the other side — the side of Disbelief—the endeavours that are making by Theists to pack and float a raft a-head of Niagara would be purely matter of ridicule, if the consequences to these schemes were not what they are.”¹

Theologus.—It seems to us that there is just as much room for the exercise of charity between Christians, on the supposition that we are responsible for each one of our beliefs, as on the admission of such views as the following. “This is that sifting of spirits—this is that fiery trial which, with a peculiar intensity, is going on at this time, and is putting to the severest proof the loyalty — the religious allegiance, of many minds born and trained within the pale of Christian influence. To each of us, in a more or less pointed manner, the critical question is now put, whether we will stand by Heaven — by Truth — by Goodness; or will range ourselves with

¹ Restoration, pp. 248, 249.

primæval rebellion, and be compromised with those whose quarrel with God may be older than the mountains?"¹

Religious intolerance. *Origen.* — It is perfectly true that we must "earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints," but this opinion that every error implies guilt and insincerity will open the floodgates of "religious intolerance," which "is the most odious and insufferable of all."

Theologus. — When two parties contradict each other, if each of them immediately concludes that his neighbour is wrong, and insincere and guilty, and acts on this conclusion, charity would be seriously outraged. But if each of them will suspect himself of error and insincerity, and re-examine the point in dispute with greater care, both truth and charity would be gainers.

Celsus. — What is religious intolerance but one man telling another man, that he is wrong and insincere, and that on the most vital question of all?

Origen. — No, my friend; you are now confounding religious intolerance with "an enlightened attachment to the truth itself."

Theologus. — Well, do you not see, that attachment to the truth itself, cannot be enlightened, unless it be an attachment to the truth, as truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth? If it be possible in one question to discriminate between intolerance and zeal for truth, why not in every question?

¹ Restoration, p. 370.

Origen. — Yes, but when every man begins to call his crotchet true, and to treat as insincere all who smile at him and it, we shall have old scenes renewed in tenfold extravagance, and Christianity itself will become “an inconceivably paltry, troublesome, intolerant thing.”

Theologus. — Our principle sanctions no man in calling his crotchet true. It is our principle alone that makes a man guilty for elevating a whim into a doctrine or truth to be defended even unto blood. Admitting the usual maxim about involuntary error, there is no reasonable means of guarding against the absurdity of men’s magnifying mole-hills into mountains, and turning traditions and fancies into commands of God. Truth being thus sacrificed, charity is falsely inflated to conceal the wrong. When once you look upon your neighbour as the hapless victim of involuntary error, there is no room in your bosom for that charity towards him which “rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;” you must regard him either with that bigotry which denies him, in one form or another, the privileges of manhood, or with that latitudinarianism which immolates truth at the shrine of a pseudo-benevolence.

Celsus. — “I will be tolerant of everything else, but every other man’s intolerance.”

Origen. — “The worst of it is, that this latitudinarian charity is apt to degenerate into a curious sort of bigotry. It is always vehement enough against any opinions that imply that opinions are of any importance, or indeed

against any opinion *except* the opinion that no opinions are of any."¹

Theologus.—All that I contend for is, that this sentiment be applied to every case to which it is fairly applicable. Every truth is vastly important; wherever, then, truth is involved and a conflict arises as to where the truth is to be found, forbearance and kindness to each other need not compromise ardour for the truth. Since zeal for truth is only legitimate and consistent when based upon the utmost diligence and candour in seeking truth, the duty of charity itself will not be correctly appreciated apart from this zeal. No one will profess to care for a base counterfeit charity; what we all want is the true genuine charity. There is no such charity apart from truth. Without the love of truth, no one can understand the true charity. Hence when any one by a hasty and inconsiderate decision on any question whatever, injures or opposes truth, he is the very person who is likely to wound charity also in one of two ways, according to his temper and his circumstances, — either by intolerance and bigotry, or by pusillanimity and softness, in one or other of their thousand shapes. The charity of truth and of the Bible breathes nothing but tenderness and love to the person of every man, while opposing with stern inflexibility every vice and every error without respect of persons.

Celsus.—Though you thus refuse to acknowledge that there is a sincere denier of the truth of Christianity, you

¹ A Defence, pp. 28, 29—Note.

are prepared to allow that a man may sincerely doubt its claims. For unless you concede this, how can there be a patient and honest investigation?

Theologus.—Unquestionably. We would much rather see a sincere doubter on any question, than a hurried profession of the truth itself, without due examination. At the same time, the sincere doubter and inquirer will soon find more or less of the rock of truth beneath his feet. There is far too little of this ingenuous hesitation and childlike investigation on both sides of the contending hosts. There would be far less infidelity without the Christian church, if there were less dogmatism within it.

Origen.—It is easy to bring a sweeping charge; it is more difficult to substantiate it.

Celsus.—Do you dispute what one of your own friends has advanced, when he says, “Do you imagine that I can so think of the good Christian folks of this present time, as to their judgment, as to their intelligence, or as to their conscientious diligence, as that I could be willing to leave Christianity in their hands, undisturbed and irresponsible? far from it.”¹ It is some consolation to us to find, that even on the shewing of your advocates, we are, on the whole, ethically and spiritually, not much worse than the mass of professing Christians.

Theologus.—Has it never struck you as a singular fact, that our denominational differences are almost as hereditary as an entailed estate, or as Mohammedanism and Hinduism? The young people born and educated in

¹ Restoration, p. 246.

one denomination are sure, almost universally, to adopt the peculiarities of that denomination. Thus sectarian controversies are perpetuated, which would die a natural death, if the rising generation, and especially students for the ministry, would "prove *all* things, and hold fast that which is good." The Christian church will never preach this text with effect to the world, till they practise it more themselves.

Origen.—Might I now ask you to explain a little more fully what you mean by admitting "sincerity to be the test of truth?"

Sincerity shewn
to be the test of
truth.

Theologus.—Taking sincerity as already explained to signify, not consistency or firmness in adhering to our view, but care and conscientiousness in adopting it, the position seems to be free from difficulty. Light is the test of the eye, and the eye is the test of light. That is dark, which to a sound eye is dark; and that is light which to a sound eye is light. The eye to which darkness is not darkness, or light not light, is not healthy. So also, *that is true which to a sincere mind is true, and that is error which to a sincere mind is error.* The mind to which truth is not truth, or error not error, is not sincere,—not honest with itself, if it have the power of intelligence. If by a sincere mind be meant a mind which honestly desires to know the truth on a given point, and which will not say or think that a proposition respecting that point is either true or false without due attention and sufficient evidence, it seems impossible to avoid the inference, that sincere

belief is belief of the truth, and belief of the truth is sincere belief. It is well to notice, that there may be a mere professed belief of the truth, which being without sincerity is no real belief of the truth at all. So also there may be an empty profession of sincerity, which shall prove itself to be empty by denying truth or affirming error.

To maintain that an individual is responsible for some of his beliefs, while at the same time it is admitted, that he may sincerely and unblameably believe error to be truth on any subject, is a clear contradiction. For if a man be liable in any instance to affirm as true an erroneous proposition,—that is, to mistake intellectual darkness for intellectual light, it must be, either because he is not able, or because he is not willing, to perceive the distinction between truth and error in that particular case. If he be *unable* to perceive the distinction, then in that matter being destitute of the privilege of intelligence, he is exempt from the obligation of responsibility. But if while a man is able in anything to distinguish between truth and error, he *will not*, then he is at once intelligent, responsible, and culpable.

If it be no matter *what* a man believes, as is broadly stated, and loosely assumed, and craftily insinuated, times without number, then truth is an empty name. But this opinion is a hackneyed phase of scepticism; for the proposition that would make all other propositions worthless, makes itself worthless too. If, then, there be value in truth, in *all* truth, and in some truth value incal-

culable, to suppose that mankind should be so constituted, that while they feel an obligation to eschew error and embrace the truth, and while their welfare actually depends upon their doing so, both in thought and in action, they should yet without any fault on their part mistake the one for the other, is surely to impeach the character of their Creator. He who would attempt to screen himself from the guilt of insincerity behind a mere verbal orthodox creed, and he who would palliate his erroneous belief by the plea of sincerity, are equally endeavouring to vindicate themselves by criminating the Most High.

It is a matter of profound regret, that in the controversies regarding the Divine existence and character, the contending parties should so frequently have taken hold, the one of the one side of this truth, and the other of the other side. It has been a main position of one party, that his sincerity will acquit a man, whatever he may believe. Their opponents, after granting that a man may sincerely believe in error, have vainly bent their efforts to the establishment of objective truth. For what use can there be in displaying the truth objectively, if the sincere and upright mind may contemplate without recognising her? The plea of inward sincerity being equally valid with the plea of outward truth, the warfare between the occupants of these two impregnable citadels must be endless. Let the defenders of the existence of God and a divine revelation once refuse to grant that sincerity is a test of truth, and start their apology with

the affirmation or concession that a man may be conscientious in a bad cause as well as in a good one, and they not only give their opponents an argument which, as we have just seen, nothing can refute, but they also thereby unwarrantably resign one of the most powerful weapons of assault, and at the same time introduce into the very camp of truth itself confusion and anarchy.

By this concession the only effective weapon of assault falls from the Christian's grasp. Let the position that error regarding the Divine character, and the rejection of Christianity, involve a want of sincerity and candour, and consequent criminality—have once its integrity impaired, or its firmness shaken, or its prominence veiled, and wherewithal can the theist, but especially the Christian, make an aggressive movement upon the unbelieving world? He may talk of miracles, and manuscripts, and morals, of the glories of creation, and the wonders of redemption, and the terrors of judgment—these are only so many levers, which without some such point as that now indicated to form a fulcrum on which to work, are utterly powerless in his hand.

Celsus.—"When you begin by assuming broad dissent to be manifest guilt, it can matter little what you say to such a man, or how you treat him."

Theologus.—Far from it; a very great deal depends upon the manner in which a statement is made, and upon the different modes in which even the manifestly guilty may be treated.

Celsus.—"It becomes mere hypocrisy or complicity to

reciprocate courtesies with one whom you believe to be a wilful criminal.”

Theologus.—Assuredly, and for the best of all reasons; that if we do not protest against and resist rebellion, when it is avowed and acted in our presence, we are ourselves, by our very silence and inactivity, constituted rebels. But there may, and there ought to be, a vast difference between our deportment to a rebel whose trial is passed, and sentence pronounced, and doom decided, and our deportment to another whose timely submission may yet restore his tarnished honour, and retrieve his forfeited inheritance; the more especially when we are free to confess, that we ourselves have but very recently escaped from that condition, by availing ourselves of what is as open to him as to us, heaven’s amnesty.

Origen.—You said, that to deny sincerity to be the test of truth, is to throw discord into the camp of truth. How is that?

Theologus.—In this way: when it is formally admitted that a man may be sincere in error, sanction is virtually though secretly given to the wide spread and calamitous delusion, that belief in the truth, *apart from sincerity*, is the way of acceptance with God. If there be such a thing as sincerity in error, it is of course worthless, or next to worthless. How, then, can it be shewn that sincerity in the truth is in any degree better? Mental honesty and candour thus become degraded and ruined. The way is prepared for professing the truth, without possessing it. The very utterance of truth is turned into a lie; for the words of

verity are frequently found upon the lips, while the realities of verity are far from the heart. The profession even of religious truth may thus, alas! become, what we fear it often is, nothing but a subtle superstition. This hypocritical conduct finds its sanction or excuse in the insult offered to sincerity. If my neighbour may be conscientiously wrong, why should I toil at the hopeless task of being conscientiously right? If all diligence and candour will not preserve me from error, I must find a short cut to the truth, or be content with what comes first to hand. By such retorts as these, the injury done to sincerity is avenged. And we thus perceive, that when Christians attempt to exalt objective truth at the expense of subjective uprightness, the consequences are most disastrous; the outworks of infidelity are buttressed, and genuine religion is virtually betrayed.

Might we be allowed to speak of the union between the mind and the truth, as having all the security and sacredness of the marriage relation? By unfaithfulness on either side the bond is broken. There are truths which will enter that mind only which proves itself worthy of their reception. The mind that deliberately embraces error prostitutes itself. The latitudinarian charity of the day is based upon the assumption that this prostitution is lawful. To deny, therefore, that sincerity is the test of truth, and truth the test of sincerity, is to leave no vestige of dignity, or purity, or strength, either to eternal truth or to the human mind.

Origen.—The dignity, purity, and strength of the

human mind!! What, then, do you make of the doctrine of human depravity?

Theologus.—If you assert that there is “no vestige of dignity, or purity, or strength, in the human mind,” inasmuch as it is depraved, in asserting its corruption, you deny its intelligence and responsibility.

Origen.—In what, then, does the depravity of man consist?

Theologus.—In such circumstances as these, the derangement and corruption of our desires and affections; the erroneous beliefs in which every man is involved through the sins of his progenitors; the weakened tone of the ethical sentiment or conscience; and the diminished power of the will, as compared especially with the temptations to which we are exposed.

As to the indissoluble union between outward truth and inward sincerity, it seems to be the very turning point of every controversy, especially of the one that is now agitated. On one hand, men may be observed extenuating the distinction between error and truth, till it becomes a mere convenience or a petty conventionality; and, on the other hand, stretching their brotherly-love in such a generous mood as to overlook all real diversity of inward character. But all distinctions cannot be abolished; consistent communism is an actual, as well as a theoretical absurdity. Nothing remains to be done, therefore, but to erect this and the other fashionable foible of the day into the partition-wall of human society. To stop short, however, of the lowest degree of communism, to acknow-

ledge diversity of some substantial kind among men, to halt on this side of extremest pantheism, and admit that any one thing is more divine than another—to refuse to bury all the distinctions of taste, art, literature, and science, in one huge, common, loathsome grave, while the distinction between truth and error,—religious truth and religious error, between sincerity and insincerity, or virtue and vice, is really denied, or coldly admitted, or denuded of its proper and supreme authority, and of its lasting and weighty results,—to do so is surely inconsistent.

It is an inconsistency, moreover, involving the most serious consequences. If sincerity may be divorced from truth and wedded to error, then truth may not condemn error, and virtue may not abhor vice. If the man, who in some case of moment is possessed of true knowledge and genuine virtue, may not speak of the man of erroneous knowledge and spurious virtue in terms plain and forcible, which are as far removed from drivelling charity as from rancour and ill-will,—without incurring the charge of acerbity and malice; it is solely because error claims to be truth and vice to be virtue. To extend our Charity, therefore, beyond the landmarks of truth and the bulwarks of virtue,—and sincerity, in the sense that has been assigned to it, is of the essence of both, is not merely to be inconsistent, or to nullify or obliterate the distinction between truth and error and virtue and vice;—it is more, it *makes error truth and vice virtue*. The culprit seats himself by some dexterous exploit upon the bench, and has the audacity to summon the judge to the bar. Truth

is scorned because she will not sympathise and associate with error. Virtue is censured because she keeps her robes unsullied. The good man for confronting and withstanding the bad man, forfeits his goodness. Actual manifestations of this spirit are constantly occurring in social life; for while wickedness and ungodliness exist they are altogether unavoidable. There are some who on this path reach the very climax of folly and of crime; inasmuch as the Almighty himself has been spoken of as the guiltiest of all, for inflicting without mercy everlasting punishment on those, who to the last hour of their probation continue resolute and impenitent in guilt.

Charity explained. *Origen.*—Some additional explanation of your views on Charity, in connection with the matter just discussed, seems desirable.

Theologus.—Let us suppose that a number of individuals meet regularly together to prosecute various studies. Their union is based on the principle of loving truth, and loving one another. Their inquiries proceed, and they rejoice in the mutual recognition of fascinating and important doctrines. Their conjoint investigation of weighty facts, and common assiduity in watching the results of rare experiments, knit them together in closest sympathy. One after another is successful in making a valuable discovery; and the joy of each is shared by all. In this peaceful and prosperous way, while truth is developed, friendship is cemented. If, however, after a time one of this group of scientific brothers shall come to look upon a certain truth, which is recognised as such by

his companions, to be of vastly greater moment than they have been accustomed to regard it, or shall come to receive something, which they do not receive, not only as true, but also of unspeakable importance, will not this change of opinion unavoidably produce considerable change of feeling?

It would obviously be the duty of him who believed he had made an all-important discovery, to communicate to his fellows a statement of his new belief, with the grounds on which it rested. To conceal it would be unfaithfulness to truth, dishonour to himself, and unkindness to his friends. It is possible he may err in the manner of making the avowal, but make it he must. If his friends on considering his statement shall regard it as unfounded and extravagant, and refuse to adopt the new view, their respect for him will very much diminish, as will also his respect for them. Thus a change of sentiment, such as has been indicated, must, from the very nature of the circumstances, seriously disturb and mar the longest and most fraternal friendship.

Celsus.—"The chief lesson that man has to learn, is to entertain contempt and aversion for all fanaticism in philosophy as in every thing else, and to acquire the habit of tolerating and even respecting all the theories which are the legitimate offspring of the human mind and human liberty."

Theologus.—"There is much and dangerous error, as you admit, in the theories or systems you speak of;—I have yet to learn how to entertain respect for error.

Charity commands us not merely to tolerate but to love men ; truth forbids us to tolerate their errors.

Celsus. — “ The most gifted of our brethren are no more than the fragments of a larger and (as yet) ideal manhood. Even Shakspeare is only a poet. But when the fragmentariness becomes extreme, and when little men insult over our endeavours to emancipate ourselves from a littleness of ours, perhaps still less than their own, we do well to be angry. And we do better still to assert that the technical classes, from the mere shoemaker up to the mere naturalist, and from him to the mere theologian, could not do better than join our institution, and listen to the broad and general prelections of men like ———. If they soon discover that our instructors, how well soever they may know the subjects they severally teach, do most notoriously differ from one another in their more central views of things, then so much the better ; for it does us all good to deal closely with the heterodox on the neutral ground of the impersonal intellect and the catholic feelings of our nature.”

Origen. — To speak of “ heterodoxy ” on “ neutral ground ” seems something like a contradiction in terms. Nor can we admit catholicity to be a test of truth, and forget one of whom we have read :—

“ faithful found

Among the faithless, faithful only he ;
 Among innumerable false, unmoved,
 Unshaken, unseduced, untterrified,
 His loyalty he kept, his love, his zeal,
 Nor number, nor example, with him wrought

To swerve from truth, or change his constant mind,
Though single."

Theologus.—It may be added, that the only sense in which the "impersonality of the intellect" can be maintained implies, that its aberrations are personal and culpable. But let us return to the point more immediately in hand. That there is a real and immeasurable difference between taking God Himself to be our God and taking that which is not God to be our god,—our idol, will not surely be denied. The existence of the distinction, and its weighty import too, have been often acknowledged. Calvin, for instance, in the fifth chapter (§ 11) of the first book of his Institutes, reasons thus: "When we direct our thoughts by means of God's works to meditate upon Him (which all must do,) having rashly formed some conception of Deity, we immediately yield to some wild or depraved imagination of our flesh, and corrupt the pure truth of God with our folly. And although every one has some peculiar error of his own, in this we are all alike that we fall away from the one true God to monstrous conceits. In which disease not only common and dull minds are involved, but also the shrewdest and most excellent." Although Calvin in his further remarks includes Plato by name in this sweeping censure, it is true that the latter has himself recognised the very principle on which the remarks of the former are founded, and for which we are contending. Plato held that to attempt to propitiate the gods toward criminal conduct was a kind of blasphemy. This opinion evidently sup-

poses that to seek to approach Deity under a serious misconception of His character, is equivalent to approaching an idol, and thus offering indignity to the true God.

Let it be granted, then, as at least possible, that one man may have a true knowledge of God, and also be earnestly desiring and striving to have his will in obedience to the will of God, while another man, his neighbour, has not the true knowledge of God, or if he have, cares not to have his will in habitual subjection to the will of the Most High. What must be the state of feeling between two such individuals? Both parties will feel that there is an awful chasm between them; and if any one shall by some means or other pass from one side of that chasm to the other, it cannot but involve a sacrifice of former companionships. The man who holds an opinion to be as plain and certain as any proposition can be, and at the same time unspeakably momentous, must appear in some sort intolerant to all those who disagree with him in that opinion. To deny that there are *true* opinions of this description, is to deny the possibility of man knowing and serving his Maker, or to deny that there is any such thing as guilt and ungodliness in the earth. If a man know and hold to a truth which is not only most luminous but weighty, affecting obviously and directly the personal interests of every individual, though he speak of this truth in the most gentle and courteous manner, yet if he really does justice to the truth itself, his statements will inevitably excite the most uneasy and painful feelings in all with whom he differs.

They who are either theoretically or practically reckoning as God, that which is not God,—the ungodly and idolatrous of all shades,—have little patience with the godly man, who knows and fears with all his heart God as He is, when he begins to speak in their presence of the errors in which they are entangled. The difference between two such parties is so marked and so momentous, that the subject is commonly avoided in their conversation; for it cannot be discussed without intensest feeling upon both sides, and it is only in special circumstances that the pious man may legitimately force it upon the attention of the other. If the one would make any abatement in his averments, either as to the perfect plainness of the truth or as to its untold value,—neither of which he can do, the other might tolerate his opinions. If a traitor and a loyal subject be thrown together for a season, they must either avoid conversing about their common monarch, or their conversation (unless one of them, indeed, conceal his real views) will afford obvious evidence of the dread diversity of their sentiments. The truth respecting the character of God *in his more immediate relation to ourselves*, is so clear and so precious, that to doubt or disregard it is the greatest folly or the highest crime. This must be the claim and bearing of *intelligent devotion*, wherever she is found. This self-assertion she cannot and dare not qualify. It is her life,—her essence; and all compromise is impossible. Consequently she finds in every man, with whom she forms anything like an intimate acquaintance, either an enemy or a friend.

But when this high claim is allowed—a claim which, need we add, can be reasonably and effectually urged by any individual upon his fellows, only by able arguments and self-denying love, not by harsh words or haughty looks, far less by pains or penalties—when the Divine character is known and honoured in its essential integrity, there will be a special and intense affection among all those who agree in this fundamental position, while they will feel compassion for all who differ from them. The fact that this claim has been so often assumed, and by parties so diverse, is proof sufficient that there is one party to whom it rightfully belongs. To refuse to determine who this party is among numerous competitors, is to run the risk, whatever that risk may be, of disallowing the supremacy of that which is supreme. True religion, then, asserts, and must ever assert, the possession of the highest authority; she claims the unfeigned and unqualified submission of every man. Towards all who withhold this submission she is *intolerant*, not physically, but morally—not proudly, but meekly.

If there be no such thing as the true knowledge of God in the world, then dismal indeed is the condition of humanity. But if there be, it may not be compared with speculations that are yet unsettled; neither may it be placed on a level even with the established doctrines of science; for while as certain as they (on the principle that all true knowledge is equally certain), it transcends them immeasurably in value. True religion, therefore, must be confessed to be the choicest of our acquisitions,

and her crown may not be dishonoured. But her raiment is love. She breathes unbounded kindness to all men, and inspires the strongest mutual confidence and esteem among those who yield her due respect. To those who decline and resist, she is inflexibly and awfully severe. She frowns in all her divine dignity on the man who will not pay her homage. There cannot, therefore, be anything worthy of the name of harmony or sympathy among those who are not substantially at one in their views of the Divine character; while among those who are thus at one, there will be not only the closest intimacy, but large and rational forbearance, when they differ in opinion on subordinate topics.

This forbearance, however, even on points of inferior moment, cannot rest on the supposition, that men may sincerely contradict each other on any matter whatsoever. This were to return to the quicksands of unbelief. Christian forbearance is based on the principle, that direct collision of sentiments implies blameworthiness in one of the parties or the other; and inasmuch as it does so, this collision ought to be avoided to the very uttermost by the sacrifice of everything but truth itself, and, when collision does arise, each party should first suspect himself of being the censurable cause of the conflict. And even when we have found some truth, and know we have found it, without deceiving ourselves, that truth should be always uttered in the meekness of wisdom.

It is thus apparent, that TRUTH, *all truth*, has at once a repellant and an attractive force,—a dissevering and an

uniting tendency. She not only binds together those who know her, but excludes from their fellowship those who deny her. Is it proper that ignorance of *sacred truth only* shall not invalidate a man's claim to scholarship? Is it seemly that it should be indifference to *religious truth only* that does not injure any one's pretensions to be a man of letters? There cannot be a graver inconsistency than to set aside truth in religion at the call of a counterfeit charity, especially when it is done so seldom in anything else. Is not the engineer who makes a scientific error in constructing or conducting a steam-boat or a railway, and thereby causes the loss of life or the ruin of property, considered guilty of a high misdemeanour? Does charity save him?

Nothing can be more insidious and dangerous, than the attempts which are constantly made at present, both within and without the pale of the Christian church, to ignore the repellent force and disallow the dissevering tendency of truth. There are many who can scarcely be regarded as belonging to the Christian church, who never cease their sentimental harping on the attractive power and uniting influence of charity, as if religion, that is, *the correct knowledge and habitual fear of God as He is, or the only means by which man can be restored to that high position*, were some curious contrivance to gather together without discrimination everything that comes in its way,—or a solvent to dissolve into one putrid mass the ill-assorted and corrupt materials of human society! Is it not more worthy of God, more

needful to man, and more consistent with reason, to conceive of religion as a fire, which shall purge the dross, and thereby send forth a mass of purest gold?

In like manner, there are not a few Christians who fancy that the best way in which their union may be accomplished, is to excavate to a sufficient depth, and thus provide a grave of forgetfulness, wherein to entomb all the contradictory and clashing opinions of the disciples of Christ. Having finished the interment, they would erect on the same spot of ground, and in commemoration of the event, the temple of Christian concord. The building might be beautiful, but it would not be lasting. The buried and hushed-up controversies at its foundation would prove so many charges of inflammable material, which any accident might ignite and lay the temple in ruins. These controversies must be resolved by Christians seeking, and finding, and agreeing in the truth which each controversy involves; for as genuine charity, whether it be brotherly affection for the good or compassion for the erring, must fall unless supported by truth, so also is it on the immoveable rock of truth alone, that the temple of Christian union can be erected in its full proportions and in enduring splendour.

DIALOGUE IV.

MYSTERY AND CONTRADICTION.

Celsus. — Since it has been established in this discussion, that reason rightly used never deceives us, we cannot be expected to accept a religion, unless it make good its pretensions to be thoroughly reasonable.

Origen. — What do you mean by thoroughly reasonable?

Celsus. — “What the light of your mind, which is the direct inspiration of the Almighty, pronounces incredible, —that, in God’s name, leave uncredited; at your peril do not try believing that.”

Origen. — Faith may embrace what reason rejects.

Celsus. — How is this?

Origen. — I shall explain what I mean by an example. “The doctrines of prayer and predestination are often regarded as inconsistent, and by many Christians are not reconciled but by explaining away either the moral agency of man or the Sovereignty of the Creator. At first sight, they will generally appear to be incompatible; but cease to be so to those who have laid aside false notions of infinite wisdom.”¹

¹ Christian Theism, vol. ii. p. 214.

Celsus. — Your statement is not very clear. Do you regard the doctrines of prayer and predestination as simply *not incompatible*, or do you regard them as *reconciled*? You first speak as if they could be reconciled, and afterwards seem to think it enough if they cease to appear to be incompatible.

Origen. — The distinction is perhaps of little consequence.

Celsus. — So it would appear to be in the estimation of the author from whom you have just quoted. For in one page he remarks that, “between the inflexible laws of nature, and a Providence who answers prayer, *there is no inconsistency of opposite doctrines*; but only an incompetency of the human understanding, to know how they co-exist.” While in the next page, he endeavours to *show how* they co-exist, or how God “can answer prayer consistently with the laws of nature, and by means of them.”¹ It seems rather puzzling to find such a distinction formally introduced, and immediately discarded.

Theologus. — The distinction is a most important one, and has been already adverted to. The only difficulty lies in clearly apprehending its import, and consistently adhering to it in our discussions.

Origen. — It is a distinction, as some think, of vital moment in the theistic argument, which may be shortly stated thus: “The question of the origin of nature is one which we cannot possibly evade. It forces itself

¹ Christian Theism, vol. ii. p. 211, 212.

upon the reason, and presently involves it in a dilemma. But it is not, as is commonly thought, a dilemma of opposite incomprehensibles, but between an incomprehensible and an absurdity; between a conclusion above reason and one contrary to it. We cannot but shrink from the absurdity, the incomprehensibility is no more than was to be expected.”¹

Celsus.—It seems to me that a man should shrink as much from an incomprehensible conclusion, as from an absurd one. If a conclusion be above my reason, how can my reason accept it?

Mystery and
contradiction
explained.

Theologus.—This remark shews us the necessity of clearly understanding what an incomprehensibility or mystery is, and how it is to be distinguished from an absurdity or contradiction. A mystery is not found in a fact or proposition taken by itself. For if a fact or proposition be in itself mysterious, how can it be known at all? A mystery may attach itself to a proposition in two ways. The proposition may express a fact, whose explanation is incomprehensible or mysterious; or one proposition, known to be true, may stand in an evident but incomprehensible relationship to another proposition known to be true. A mystery, therefore, can be affirmed with propriety, not of a conclusion, but only of the *explanation* of a fact, or of the *relation* between two truths. A conclusion or proposition is *absurd*, when it *contradicts* another proposition, which is believed by the party

¹ Christian Theism, v. i. p. 282.

drawing the conclusion, or which is conceded to be true.

Origen.—But is there not something mysterious in the very statement, that all things were made by God, who is infinite in all His perfections ?

Theologus. — It may seem trivial to some, but it is really of great consequence, to distinguish between a statement that is mysterious, and one that is connected with, or implies, a mystery. A mystery is something not known. A proposition cannot be believed, unless we know its meaning, and also know that it is true. To say that a mysterious proposition may be believed is absurd, for it makes ignorance identical with knowledge.

Origen.—Do you then know the meaning of the infinite ?

Theologus.—I know that there is an infinite Being ; but the explanation of this fact, the mode of His existence, is to me a mystery. Infinity is to my mind simply equivalent to the non-finite, that which is without limits, —a negative conception. Every thing around me exists under conditions ; I think of the absolute Being as simply without conditions, unconditioned. The *positive* conception of the infinite or absolute is what I have not ; it is to me unknown, a mystery. Hence those who affirm that they have an intuition of the unconditioned seem to involve themselves in a contradiction. A whole is something made up of parts ; if, then, I affirm the absolute to be a whole without parts, I simply contradict myself. If I affirm the infinite to be a whole whose parts are

numberless, I again oppose myself; for so long as the parts are really unnumbered the whole is incomplete.

Celsus.—I regard the command imputed to God to extirpate the nations of Canaan to be “incredible, because it contradicts my moral and spiritual convictions of what God would do. It attributes to God what would be ‘harsh, cruel, and unjust in man;’ and therefore I must reject it.”

Origen.—Is not God good, even in permitting war, tyranny, slavery, earthquakes, shipwrecks, volcanoes, sickness and death? “Yes, I say; yes, with an unfaltering faith; but I *believe* it, and cannot *see* it; these things are what *we* should call ‘harsh, cruel, and unjust in man,’ and are utterly incomprehensible to our ‘little wisdom,’ and ‘little goodness,’ and ‘little love;’ just as His command to exterminate the Canaanites, though not so perplexing, nor a tenth part so perplexing, is also incomprehensible. But I believe that God is good *in spite* of these facts.”¹

Celsus.—It is hard to conceive how there can be two degrees, far less ten, in things unknown and incomprehensible. But passing that, and assuming that when you speak of the command itself as incomprehensible, you mean the relation between the command and the character of God, you surely have forgotten that the Bible itself does not speak of it as incomprehensible, but attempts to explain and vindicate God’s proceedings in

¹ A Defence of the Eclipse of Faith, p. 44.

the matter.—(See Levit. xviii. 24-30 ; Deut. xx. 10-18 ; Josh. ii. 12-14, xi. 19, 20.) By calling it an incomprehensible mystery, you virtually admit that this explanation and vindication are incomplete and unsatisfactory. If this command utterly to destroy the people of Canaan involve a real mystery, it cannot be expounded and defended and brought to the level of the human understanding. But your Scriptures themselves endeavour to do so ; if they fail in this endeavour, and according to your statement they have failed, we do not see how you can complacently receive these Scriptures as the word of God in spite of this failure. Not that this failure destroys positive independent evidence, but it opposes and neutralises it, and must leave the mind in that state of believing doubt, or doubtful belief, in describing which many grow eloquent.

Origen.—“ The Christian believes, from an immense variety, complexity, and convergence of proof, that the Book which contains Christianity, and the system it reveals, never came from man. Particular objections to portions of it, nevertheless—both as respects doctrine and history—may, like the correspondent difficulties in the outward universe, be attended with unanswerable perplexities ; but the Christian listens to them just as he would to a judge, who, in his summing up, tells the jury that there can be *no doubt* that the evidence—nine parts out of ten—will justify them in bringing in *one*, and only *one* verdict ; though he says there may be one, two, or three points on which the evidence is conflicting, and on

which neither himself nor mortal man can give or even suggest any plausible solution.”¹

Celsus.—The force of this reasoning depends entirely on the nature and value of the point or points on which the evidence is conflicting. If the evidence on some *main* point in the charge be at variance, or if the contradictions of witnesses implicate the moral character of one of their number whose testimony is important, will any judge affirm that in such a case there is but *one* verdict, and there can be *no doubt* about it? Now the command to exterminate the Canaanites, does involve directly and deeply the character of God; and since the Bible itself does not treat it as a mystery, you are bound to afford a sufficient explanation and defence thereof, or greatly modify, if not entirely abandon, your faith in the Christian Scriptures.

Theologus.—The assertion that the Divine command wholly to extirpate the inhabitants of the land of Canaan involves a mystery, and cannot be explained, or vindicated to the moral sense of mankind, throws the Christian advocate into more than one serious disadvantage. Whenever we appeal to the events of Providence, or the statements of the Bible, to justify God's ways to men, our appeal is legitimately arrested, unless we extend it to *all* these events and *all* these statements. To allow that some of them, and these the most forcible and critical, remain hopelessly inexplicable, is virtually to abandon our defence of the character of the Almighty.

¹ A Defence, &c., p. 181.

Again, it is certainly the fact, as has been stated, that in the Bible itself once and again are found arguments and representations, which are evidently intended to manifest the righteousness and holiness of God in His dealings towards the exterminated people.

Further, when the Christian assumes that some of God's proceedings toward men are mysterious,—in other words, that men can learn nothing from these proceedings, the unbeliever, basing his reply upon the truth which this assumption denies, namely, that it is absurd to expect that intelligent beings can learn nothing of the Divine character from the actions of the Deity towards themselves, is able, with the power thus attained, to carry confusion into his opponent's line of argument, and give to his assertion that the command in question is *immoral*, a point and a force otherwise unattainable.

Origen.—"Objections to the doctrine of
The Atonement.

Redemption generally rest on false views of the competency of man's moral judgment. On such a subject the Divine conduct cannot be within the reach of human criticism."¹

Celsus.—Does not God himself invite and demand criticism on his conduct?—(See Isa. i. 2, 3, 18; Jer. ii. 12, 13; Rom. v. 6–9).

Origen.—"We cannot sufficiently know those principles of eternal morality, which have their foundation in the Divine nature, to be able to apply them, in judgment of His dealings with a fallen world. We have not ac-

¹ Christian Theism, v. ii. p. 309.

quaintance with universal nature, to perceive the effects of the fall, or to pronounce what will be the agency of Infinite Holiness and Love to the fallen. Human reason, or human morality, is quite inapplicable to the questions.”¹

Celsus.—If, then, you hold the doctrine of the Atonement as a fact, and regard its explanation as a mystery (and I perceive no other meaning that may be attached to your words), then you regard as inconclusive and unsatisfactory the thousand attempts that have been made to shew the wisdom of that procedure on the part of God; and what you will make of one half or so of the New Testament itself, I am at a loss to conjecture. Nay, the author from whom you quote immediately contradicts himself. After reiterating his assertion in these words: —“The Divine conduct in the Redemption of the world is thus wholly beyond the criticism of reason;” he presently begins to criticise, that is, to explain and vindicate what he professes not to understand. “The revelation,” he says, “of the Divine Perfections in Scripture, and especially in the doctrines of Christianity, is consistent with the inferences of natural theology. The Christian’s God is therefore both the God of nature, and the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. It scarcely falls within our subject, to examine the direct evidences which confirm the doctrine of the Atonement. But its importance may justify a short notice of some of them.”²

¹ Christian Theism, v. ii. p. 309.

² *Ib.* pp. 313, 314.

Theologus.—If the assertion that the destruction of the Canaanites is morally incomprehensible be extravagant and perilous, much more so is the statement that the relation between the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus and the character of His Father, Jehovah, is mysterious. The remarks which we formerly offered on the first case apply more forcibly to the present one. It seems almost unaccountable how any Christian apologist could say, that “human reason, or human morality is quite inapplicable to the question.” Is not God’s gift of His own Son—His best and greatest gift, the clearest and most impressive manifestation of the Divine character? Is it not here, more than anywhere else, that Divine wisdom, love, and righteousness, are most conspicuously displayed? And is it not *this very display* of God’s Holiness and mercy, that is the fittest and most effectual means in working upon men’s obdurate hearts, to bring them to their right mind, and win them back to their God? To tell us that the Atonement is a mystery, is to give a death-blow to intelligent practical Christianity, and plunge us in the depths of superstition.

Then as to the mere logic of the question, if an intelligent being thinks that the Great God acts toward himself on principles which he does not and cannot understand, his worship will be blind, and his confidence, if confidence there be, that of a slave. When a Christian speaks of the mysteries of Providence, he means, or he ought to mean, not that he cannot now reconcile the events referred to as mysterious with God’s infinite wisdom, love and power,

but simply that they form part of a large plan which he does not comprehend in all its details. For to the godly man there is properly speaking no mystery connected with his sufferings, however sharp or long continued; the consciousness of his guilt ever harmonises his tribulation with the righteousness of his God. The hypothesis, then, that the principles on which God deals with us, even in any instance, and much more in the case of "not sparing his own Son, but delivering him up for us all," are unknown to us or unapproved by our intelligence, reduces us to fatalism, and confounds slavish submission to mere power with childlike submission to mercy and wisdom. On a hypothesis like this, how can Theism, much less Christianity, be successfully defended? The paladium of true religion is all but abandoned into the enemy's hand.

It thus appears that it is necessary to be always careful in distinguishing a mystery from a contradiction. When we have a doctrine which involves a real mystery, as that of the Trinity, taken by itself, or those of the Divine Foreknowledge and man's responsibility taken together, we must be cautious in the use of language, lest we involve ourselves in a *verbal* contradiction and give an advantage to the gainsayers. On the other hand, to plead as a mystery, what is not a mystery, is sure to land us in a self-inconsistency, as we have just seen in the cases of the Atonement and the destruction of the Canaanites.

Moral Evil.

Origen.—It will not be denied that the best method of settling the disputes in re-

gard to the relation between God's character and the prevalence of evil in the world, is to treat moral evil as a profound mystery.

Theologus.—One mystery is as profound as any other, if you adhere to the definition given above; and the best method in every case is the method that is according to truth.

Origen—Let me explain myself. "All that we can know is, that the possibility of sin lies in the fact of personality; in other words, in the fact of human freedom. And as this fact is wholly inexplicable, so is equally the sin which has sprung from it. As to the final difficulty of the origin of evil, it admits in its nature of no solution. It presents an impenetrable mystery."¹

Celsus.—When one fact can be traced to another fact, it is not usual to call the former inexplicable; for *it* is explicated by the latter. Again, whoever assumes that the origin of evil is an impenetrable mystery, thereby precludes himself from attempting any explanation of it, and rejects the explanation offered by others. With what consistency, then, can the writer you have quoted afterwards say, "Having acknowledged to the full extent the awful mystery of sin, we might rest our answer on this mystery?" Clearly, if it be a mystery, the answer *must* rest there. But he adds: "Wholly inscrutable, there is nothing about it more inscrutable than its continued power of resistance to the gospel—than its opposition to the truth bearing upon it at every point, and

¹ Theism, pp. 343, 344.

summoning it to surrender. A few words of explanation, however, suggest themselves.”¹ It is curious, indeed, to hear the explanation of what is inscrutable and unknown.

Origen.—But the existence of evil in the world does not affect the inference which we draw from the good that is in the world in regard to the Beneficence of Deity. “It is certainly puzzling that the works of a good Being should be in any respect marred by unhappiness. Yet the partial unhappiness cannot for a moment be entitled to set aside the prevailing happiness.”²

Celsus.—If the existence of the partial unhappiness be an awful and inscrutable mystery, as many of your friends affirm, so also will be the existence of prevailing happiness; unless we act like children who reject the bitter medicine, and suck the sugar plum. If the good that is in the world justify some belief in Divine goodness, the evil that is in the world must affect our estimate of the Divine character.

Origen.—“The very utmost that can be demanded is, that the more serious aspects of misery which exist in human life be recognised as difficulties in the way of the complete theistic inference.”³

Celsus.—If you even grant, that the evils in the world are “negative presumptions,” which “leave the conclusion of absolute goodness (in God) uncertain on the mere sphere of nature,”⁴ you abandon the notion of their mysteriousness; you allow them to have weight and

¹ Theism, p. 363. ² *Ib.* p. 301. ³ *Ib.* p. 301. ⁴ *Ib.* p. 300.

meaning in the argument; and till they are satisfactorily explained without detriment to the Divine character, your conclusion is confessedly uncertain. We observe, then, a plain contradiction in this author when he afterwards asserts: "It is only the evil (not the good in the world) that is utterly unintelligible."¹ How can it be utterly unintelligible, if it be "a negative presumption," rendering the theistic conclusion uncertain? Neither is it unintelligible, if, as other Christians affirm, it can be reconciled with the Divine Goodness. On either supposition its mysteriousness is given up.

Origen.—"But if we could see the whole plan (of Divine government) in its extended development, many things that now seem to us exceptional and contradictory might lose this character altogether, and even expand into special means of advance in the ever-enlarging display of the Divine beneficence. The mystery which every where encompasses our finite sphere of observation, may only conceal from us the wisdom and the goodness that are really present in many phenomena where we cannot even trace them. The limitation of our faculties is thus recognised as in some manner explanatory of the difficulties that meet us in regard to our subject; and it is quite validly so held in a general sense."²

Celsus.—"In these remarks you speak as if a mystery must necessarily be an argumentative difficulty. That I do not understand. We have just seen in a special instance that if the evil in the world be a difficulty in the

¹ Theism, p. 303.

² *Ib.* p. 301, 302.

theistic argument it is not a mystery. And if it be a mystery it cannot be a difficulty. It is an abuse of language to affirm, that something which we cannot know, or do not know, is a difficulty or stumbling-block in regard to what we do know. The reason why a mystery is supposed to involve a difficulty is, because it is confounded with a contradiction, as is done in the above remarks. What is unknown or mysterious may be discovered or revealed, and thus “lose its character,” and unfold to us “the wisdom and the goodness that are really present in many phenomena, where we cannot even trace them” now. But what is “contradictory” can never lose *its* character.

Origen.—The author referred to, however, qualified his observation, thus : “many things that now *seem* to us exceptional and contradictory might lose this character.”

Celsus.—This only makes the matter worse ; it is strange that so often in our best writers a mystery and a *seeming* contradiction are regarded as synonymous. Let it be said plainly that a mystery and a contradiction are the same ; and there is an end of the matter—an end of all truth, argument, and religion to finite beings. If this be so, to speak or write as if a mystery were a *seeming* contradiction—an incomprehensible, a *seeming* absurdity ; is a most palpable mystification. You might as well say, that a guinea is apparently brass. Because, if what is called a seeming contradiction be a real contradiction, why not say so openly and at once, and avow the

identity of the absurd and the mysterious? If what is called a seeming contradiction be *not* a real contradiction, it is improper to call it a seeming contradiction, except in speaking of those parties who take it to be what it is not; and whose error it would be praiseworthy to point out.

Theologus.—Certainly. A mystery is not a contradiction, nor, if viewed aright, is it an apparent contradiction. Hence it involves no real or legitimate difficulty. As to the argument about the prevalence of evil and misery in this world, it may be observed, that if we are to base our knowledge of God's character on the consideration of what God has done, we are bound to take an impartial view of all the Divine works. It will not do, when some facts go against our theory, to set them aside as mysterious. Our theory must rest on all the facts. Unless, therefore, we can *reconcile* the existence and prevalence of evil with the Holiness of God, our argument is uncertain or incomplete. The Bible and reason effect this reconciliation by referring moral evil to the free agency of the creature.

Free Agency. *Origen.*—But is not free agency itself a mystery?

Celsus.—What is more precisely the meaning you include in this statement?

Origen.—"The fact of human freedom is in its very character inexplicable. This fact transcends the conditions of the logical faculty. It is not only not wonderful that we cannot understand freedom, but the fact is such in its very idea that it is impossible we ever can under-

stand it, transcending as it necessarily does that logical power of which it is the condition. We have no claim to comprehend it, for (as logicians) we do not contain it—it contains us.”¹

Celsus.—This language seems to mean that the fact itself is mysterious ; we cannot, then, have even a simple knowledge that it is true. Unless the fact of liberty can be expressed in an intelligible proposition, no man can believe or accept it. How can the author referred to use the words which you have quoted, and in the very same page affirm, that “ this fact is to be reasoned from. It stands at the head of our rational nature as its source ? ” How can we “ reason from ” a fact, which “ does not come within the conditions of our logical faculty, but transcends these conditions ? ”

Origen.—That author, perhaps, meant that it is the explanation of the fact that is mysterious ; it is ultimate, and cannot be referred to any other fact.

Celsus.—Does he, then, deny that man is created by God ? Is not our moral liberty referred by theists to the Creating fiat of Him they call the Almighty ?

Origen.—He must simply mean that the relation between God’s sovereignty and our free agency is mysterious.

Celsus.—If that were his meaning his language is somewhat inappropriate. Besides, in a few pages further on he distinctly speaks of this relation and its incomprehensibility ; and therefore, it is the more probable that

¹ Theism, p. 260.

he really means to say, that the fact of moral freedom itself is incomprehensible.

Theologus.—This much, at all events, seems to be granted, that there is a mystery in the relation between the freedom of the intelligent creature and the foreknowledge and Sovereign control of the Almighty Creator.

Origen.—This is not generally admitted, for the necessarian scheme of philosophy, which is held by many, is an attempt to explain as well as defend the prescience of the omniscient.

Celsus.—But it is the opinion of others, as competent probably as those you refer to, that this scheme defends foreknowledge in God by abandoning free agency in man. This will better appear if we consider the questions regarding the Providence ascribed to God in the working of miracles and answering prayer.

Miracles.

Is the mode in which God effects a miracle, mysterious in your estimation or not?

Origen.—The point you mention is mysterious to this extent at least, that man cannot distinguish between one mode of the Divine efficiency and another. “To suppose that, because the order of nature is fixed to us, the Divine Father cannot exercise through that order a special providence towards His children, is simply a presumptuous imagination of the most unworthy kind. To conceive of any order of events, or any facts of nature, as less directly connected than others with their Divine Author, is an absurdity. Only suppose the Deity equally present in all his works, equally active in all,

and Providence no longer admits of a twofold apprehension.”¹

Celsus.—This is a fair inference from the principles of necessity, which assert that in the moral as in the physical world, every event has for its cause another event, till we go back to the first fiat of the Almighty “in the beginning.” If you admit this theory, and the consequence from it which has just been stated, that *a twofold apprehension of Providence is impossible*, then it is equally impossible to distinguish a miracle from a common event, or an answer to prayer from the prosperity of fools. If the reality of miracles and the efficacy of prayer be given up, *you* must admit that man’s free agency is in some danger.

Origen.—“Because God, for obvious reasons, maintains the forth-puttings of His Efficient Energy, after certain modes which, collectively, we call Nature, why should this exclude new and special forth-puttings of that energy, when He may see meet—in other words, when fitting occasions may arise? Why should such fresh expressions of Creative Power be supposed to be irregularities, ‘interferences’ in the great plan of creation—and not, as according to the genuine theistic conception they truly are, parts in the development of that great plan contemplated from the first?”²

Celsus.—If these “*new and special forth-puttings*” of Divine energy do not give us “a twofold apprehension” of Providence, we must begin to doubt if one and one

¹ Theism, p. 66, 67.

² *Ib.* p. 79.

make two. Suppose we witnessed "a fresh expression of Creative Power," it must have something to distinguish it from the older "forth-puttings of His Efficient Energy which we call nature." If there be "fresh expressions of Creative power," "the order of nature is fixed to us," not universally and to the last iota, but *only in a limited degree*, and one event must be "less directly connected than" another with God.

Origen.—Any supposition, similar in its features to the theory of development, which embraces the causes of all change and progress, and is limited in its application to the material world, is not incompatible either with theism or with Christianity. For the manner in which these causes have been communicated by the Creator to matter, whether through occasional interventions or by continuous agency, may be, in the main, but a secondary question. It may be known or conjectured that these different *notions* of the Divine agency have no ultimate difference of objective signification, and are equally true.¹

Celsus.—Your mode of speech is peculiar, and liable to objection, although it has an air of modesty. Why do you say, "It may be known," "may be a secondary question?" If it *is* known, why not say so? if it is *not* known, how do you learn that it may be known? But as to the merits of the question, if a development theory, embracing "the causes of *all* change and progress," be *limited to the material world*, it can be so only on the

¹ See Christian Theism, vol. i. pp. 111, 125.

supposition that the moral world has no influence over the material world. Is this supposition consistent with facts? Does not the conduct of man, who is a moral agent, modify and control, to a great extent, the physical events that take place on the globe? The Deluge that happened in the time of Noah, had, as you believe, a moral cause, and it materially affected the changes and progress of animal and vegetable life. Looking at the entire range of Providence, as we are bound to do, is there no difference between an “*occasional intervention*” and a “*continuous agency*?”

Origen.—There seems no ground to affirm a difference. For “the question of motives internal to the Divine Nature is manifestly out of our sphere. Reason can bear us to a Great First Cause, but cannot look into His unsearchable Nature, much less affirm that the connection of causes and effects, which is universal within the sphere of our observation, is in any way applicable to the Divine Essence.”¹

Celsus.—The plea of ignorance is very convenient; but is not always valid. The very conception of a miracle is impossible; unless you admit a distinction between the occasional agency of God, and his continuous agency in general laws. And that occasional agency is impossible, if “the connection of causes and effects” be “universal within the sphere of our observation.”

Origen.—“But it is here necessary to bear in mind the distinction between a physical and moral necessity.

¹ Christian Theism, vol. i. p. 334.

A doctrine which regards the Divine Agency as necessarily determined by the eternal attributes of Wisdom and Goodness, and in conformity with their eternal moral law, is something very different from an evolution of physical causes.”¹

Celsus.—Then this distinction between moral and physical causes, you regard as determined and without exception?

Origen.—Not exactly. “It is worth consideration, whether the doctrine of human necessity do not verge on pantheism, at least when the determining causes of the will, *whether physical or moral*, are derived by necessity from the Divine Sovereignty. To deny all originating power of the will, must be to place the primordial and necessary causes of all things in the Divine Nature.”²

Celsus.—To deny this distinction in humanity, of which we know something, and assert it of Deity, into “whose unsearchable nature” reason “cannot look,” is a double inconsistency. The confusion is only intensified by adding:—“Whether it be choice or necessity, that a good and powerful Being does that which is good, is nothing more than a question of words.”³ Nor is the darkness lessened, when the same author says elsewhere, “without doubt it must be morally necessary that God will do what is good and right.”⁴ The argument indeed is not directly affected by the contradiction involved in the two last quotations. It concerns a man himself alone to assert,

¹ Christian Theism, vol. i. p. 195.

³ *Ib.* pp. 195, 196.

² *Ib.* p. 196.

⁴ *Ib.* p. 332.

first, that the distinction between choice and necessity in Deity is one of words, and secondly, to maintain that "without doubt" God "must" act necessarily. But it does concern the argument, when in the next page he writes thus: "It may still be asked,—Does this moral necessity, that God will do what is good and right, extend to the whole agency of the Almighty, and determine His work in the universe to be in all things exactly what it is? We have here," he says, "it is evident, a curious and a useless question." Now this curious and useless question is exactly the question between the Pantheist and the Christian.

Theologus.—To a great extent it is. To deny the possibility of miracles is to affirm pantheism. Till we obtain, therefore, a clear and accurate notion of what a miracle is, we are certainly not free from the entanglements of pantheism. And since scarcely two Christian men agree in their conceptions of a miracle, the intellectual conflict between pantheism and Christianity is yet undecided. It has yet to be determined in some of the higher questions, what is the line which separates the most important truth from the most seductive error.

Origen.—What can be more explicit on the question than such a statement as this:—"If the whole phenomena of the universe be one chain of necessary development; if man and his actions are strictly inevitable pulsations of the one great source of being, then what is properly called moral evil has no existence."¹

¹ Infidelity, pp. 71, 72.

Celsus.—This writer does not say whether he means by *necessary* development, a *physical* or *moral* necessity. He probably meant a physically necessary development; and elsewhere you would find him pleading for a moral necessity. In stating the distinction between these two necessities, however, he would find the same difficulties as have now been pointed out in others.

Theologus.—The truth seems to be, that when men plead for necessity as ruling in the affairs of the universe, it makes little matter whether it be called moral or physical; for on either supposition it follows, “that the chain of endless causation cannot be broken;” hence miracles are impossible, and pantheism is unavoidable.

Origen.—“But even when it is admitted that the Divine agency is always ordered according to fixed laws, which may be called laws of nature, it is a great mistake to take for granted that these laws are either independent of the Deity, or unfit to authenticate a special revelation of His Will.”¹

Celsus.—It seems to me self-evident, that if the Divine agency be *always* ordered according to *fixed* laws, it is impossible that these laws can authenticate a special revelation.

Origen.—Surely “it is no less a miracle, when the lower law of nature is modified by the higher law, at the exact time at which it pleases God to make a revelation of His Will, than if the nature which is known to us were modified by His immediate interference. Thus, to illus-

¹ Christian Theism, vol. ii. p. 201.

trate by the calculating engine of Mr Babbage, it is no less a proof of knowledge and of power superior to the engine itself, to predict that a law which has held good for a million and one instances will change at the million and second, than to be able to produce such a change, by interfering with the movements of the machine.”¹

Celsus.—But the *prediction* of such a change is as inconsistent with the original supposition as is the *effecting* of such a change. If the prediction is included in the Divine agency, which is “ordered according to fixed laws,” then the engine should predict the change, or the illustration fails in the most important point of the comparison. If it be granted that the prediction is not the work of the machine, the assumption that the Divine agency is *always* ordered according to fixed laws is abandoned. Besides, the author referred to openly departs from this assumption, when in the same page he says:—“after all, it is impossible to ascribe the knowledge of Joshua that the sun and moon would obey so extraordinary a command, to anything less than an immediate revelation from heaven.” An immediate revelation must mean a direct interposition as distinguished from the working out of an eternal law.

Theologus.—The conclusion to which we are led seems to be this. The Providence of God must be recognised as operating sometimes by general laws, and sometimes by special interpositions. And as there is properly speaking only one kind of necessity, this necessity must

¹ Christian Theism, vol. ii. pp. 201, 202.

be denied both of human and Divine actions. We believe in the necessity of the Divine existence without extending it to the Divine works; as Augustine says, God changes his operations but not his purpose;¹ and thus we obtain a well-defined line between Pantheism and a Personal God. It is our own personality alone that gives us any conception of a personal God. And our power over matter by working in harmony with the laws of matter may give us some notion of God's power to change events, without changing laws, but by new interpositions in accordance with these laws or independently of them. If we exclude special interferences from Divine Providence, and reduce it all to the carrying out of laws, eternal and immutable, what mystery remains in the relationship between the subordinate actions of man and the sovereign control of God? Liberty, as well as mystery, is altogether excluded, and nothing but fatalism remains. Fatalism is not a deep mystery, as some Christians would say; but a horrid lie, a black contradiction. On the other hand, admit occasional interpositions of the hand of the Almighty among the doings of mankind, and there is plainly room for miracles and prophecy and inspiration and answers to prayer, and there is also before us the unapproachable mystery, before which we would stand in silent awe,—How can we be free and yet the Most High predict our actions? How can we do *our* will, and God do *His* will, however contrary they may be? How can man purpose, and plan, and act, as if there were no God, while God

¹ Conf. Lib. i. c. 4.

controls his plans and thoughts, no less than his actions ?

Prayer.

Origen.—In attempting to escape from

Scylla you will fall into Charybdis. If you assume the occasional agency of God to find an answer to prayer, you must abandon “the uniformity of the laws of nature,”—you must deny that “all things are bound in unerring laws.”

Theologus.—The principle of special manifestations of Divine power, in addition to His agency through general laws, does not at all interfere with the uniformity of these laws. Man can influence the course of events without changing laws ; so surely God can. *Many* “things are bound in unerring laws,” because there are some laws, and these laws are uniform. But to assert that “*all* things are bound in unerring laws” is sheer pantheism. This sentiment, extending the “inflexible laws of nature,” “the fixed course of nature,” and so forth, universally to every event or change which is diffused through our Christian Theology, cannot be distinguished from the unblushing Pantheism which affirms, “that the forces inherent in matter, and those which govern the moral world, exercise their action under the control of primordial necessity”—for after all the thing is really the same whether it be called physical or moral necessity. Christian theism thus becomes, in reality as well as in name, “a pantheism of goodness.”¹ Pantheism being the denial of the distinction between good and evil, for “the possibility of evil is the alternative of pantheism,”²

¹ Christian Theism, v. i. p. 198.

² *Ib.* p. 203.

a pantheism of goodness is of course equivalent to a pantheism of evil.

Celsus.—How do you account for an answer coming to prayer on the supposition that *all* events are fixed by primordial laws?

Origen.—Many hypotheses have been framed to meet this difficulty.

Celsus.—Indeed! So Christians are at variance on this point as well as on others.

Origen.—Some regard the reconciliation of these two facts—the divine response to prayer, and the necessary concatenation of all events, as impossible, and the relation between them as mysterious to man.

Celsus.—But the remarks that have been made show that these two alleged facts are really contradictory and in opposition to one another. For if the answer to prayer be the ordinary result of an eternal law, then the event, which is affirmed to be in reply to a petition, would have happened independently of the prayer, or else the prayer itself is only another link in the unbroken chain. And if your supplications, as well as the events which are called their answers, be fixedly predetermined from all eternity, or, in other words, take place according to inflexible laws, then our responsibility and personality are a mere name, and Providence resolves itself into a necessary development of Deity.

Origen.—“The divine agency need not be occasional, to answer occasional prayers, because infinite wisdom takes account of all occasional events of finite wills, in

the foundation of its eternal plans. Hence the Almighty does not contravene the laws of nature ; He can answer prayer consistently with them, and by means of them. All the changes of endless time were spread before Him in the first constitution of things. That vast plan took account of all the revolutions of the material world, and all the movements of the capricious wills of men, and contained provision for every particular emergency. It included an answer to every true prayer.”¹

Celsus.—The author should have added ;—It included also every prayer, true as well as untrue, and his pantheistic scheme would have been completed. No pantheist ever denied the *wisdom* of the development of the Deity in the universe ; or, in other words, that this development is systematic and according to a plan. Nor has the absolute goodness of this system or plan been ever questioned. And as to its *vastness*, that is the key-stone of the pantheistic doctrine ; *every* change, mental and material, is included in its universal sweep.

Theologus.—That all the changes of endless time were spread out before God in the beginning, is involved in the attribute of omniscience. To reconcile this truth with the free agency of man, is the question. To us it seems to be a mystery ; and nothing more can in propriety be said about it. If it be a mystery, any attempt to dispel its mysteriousness,—to fathom its depth,—to defend it by explaining it, will only lead, as we have just seen by two examples, to self-contradiction.

¹ Christian Theism, vol. ii. p. 212.

Mistakes through
ignorance.

Origen. — Still I cannot but think, that an absurdity and an incomprehensible, — a mystery and a contradiction, are more nearly related than you have represented. May a man not go seriously wrong through ignorance? “It has come to be felt and seen, and to be acknowledged too, on all sides, that TRUTH, in relation to any particular subject, touching immediately or remotely the well-being of men — either the individual man, or the social—can be only one portion of, or one aspect of, UNIVERSAL TRUTH; and that if we would secure ourselves against mischievous mistakes and illusions as to that single subject, whatever it may be, we must know, not merely the whole of itself, but what it borders upon, and then the bordering of those remoter neighbours, one upon another; and so onward and round about must we advance, until we have fairly made the circuit of all things, or of all things which it is granted to man to measure and compass.”¹

Celsus.—If we can know nothing accurately and surely till we have made the entire circuit of human knowledge, the mass of mankind must be doomed to infidelity or implicit faith. If our only reasonable security “*against mischievous mistakes and illusions*,” be the possession of “universal truth”—a knowledge “of all things which it is granted to man to measure and compass,” then indeed ignorance and error are confounded, and there is no difference between what is above or beyond our reason and what is opposed to reason. On this supposition, it is

¹ Restoration of Belief, p. 4.

vain to profess our belief in any truth, till we find, and profess our belief in, all truth ; and the author you have quoted departs from his own principle, when he says elsewhere : “ I would not be thought disposed to treat slightly the catalogue of difficulties that attach to the Christian argument, *at specific points*. Real are some of these difficulties ; and some are fatal to certain gratuitous assumptions, held to on the Christian side : not one of them should be inconsiderately dismissed. But not one of them touches the integrity of our faith ; nor can the mass entire avail at all to abate the confidence of our persuasion, that the GOSPEL OF CHRIST is from HEAVEN, and carries with it an AUTHORITY which time does not impair, and which eternity shall unfold and confirm.”¹ The presence of difficulties most certainly proves ignorance. If this ignorance does not impair “ the integrity of your faith,” mere ignorance on one point does not necessarily entail “ a mischievous mistake ” on another point.

Origen. — But these intellectual or logical difficulties are not so easily got quit of. I understand the argument, that if they be mysteries, they are properly speaking no difficulties at all ; and if they are contradictions or absurdities, they lie not in the objects of our thoughts, but in our thoughts themselves, and are not to be tolerated, but cleared away. Still may not these difficulties be something else than a mere absurdity or incomprehensible ?

¹ Restoration of Belief, p. 110.

Theologus.—What else may they be?

Origen. — “The very same body of facts concerning the woes and disorders — hopeless as they are, and purposeless as they seem, which press upon humanity—these facts, rudely regarded by the sages of pagan antiquity, and which impelled them to reject the hypothesis of a Supreme wisdom, benevolence, and power — come before us now, unchanged or scarcely mitigated, and they not merely perplex the reason—they do more, they distract us, because we have been long trained in the meditative converse with an Idea of the Supreme Wisdom, Benevolence, and Power, immeasurably surpassing any conception of these attributes which the ancient mind had ever entertained. That which was an insoluble problem to the ancient classic reason, is also, to the modern mind, a problem insoluble ;—but it is more than an intellectual stumbling-block, for it puts at fault our consciousness of first Truths.”¹

Celsus.—Just so, I understand you. These difficulties are not a sheer absurdity, or we might and ought to shake ourselves free of them. Neither are they a blank and fathomless mystery, or else we might, as we ought, patiently stand humble and self-abased before it. But they are something, which “perplex the reason” in such a way, and so “distract us,” as not only to present “an insoluble problem,” but “an intellectual stumbling-block,” which “puts at fault our consciousness of first Truths.” The only interpretation which I can assign to this de-

¹ Restoration of Belief, p. 367.

scription is, that these difficulties are the result and evidence of the fact that consciousness in man is not trustworthy, and that human reason is inherently invalid—a sentiment which, as you know, is the *ne plus ultra* of scepticism.

Origen. — But whatever may be the nature of these difficulties, the Bible shews us how to bear them. The Great Teacher “does not propound the main articles of a Theistic belief, or speak of them as if they needed to be ascertained or defended. Much less does He recognise, as if they were a burden upon that belief, the staggering difficulties which oppress us of this age, and with which the thoughtful in all times have so vainly striven. That heavy load of troubled speculation which weighs us down, does not seem to have come into His view when He invites the weary to seek their rest in Him. This ‘Man of sorrows,’ and ‘acquainted with griefs,’ gives no expression to *those* griefs which, to many of the thoughtful and sensitive among His followers, have outweighed the pressure of the most extreme personal sufferings, so that they have been tempted to say — ‘I am indeed afflicted — yet would endure all with cheerfulness, if the thick darkness that overspreads these heavens were withdrawn, or if only I could see a verge of the dawn upon the cloud.’ And yet if we do not find in the teaching of Christ that which we should so gladly find, we find at least the rudiments of peace, and a remedy against distraction, which, if we will accept it and use it, brings with it as much acquiescence as is to be had, in the

nature of things, on earth ; and as much, perhaps, as is to be found even among those that have encircled the Eternal Throne since the morning hours of the Creation.”¹

Celsus.—And is this the conclusion of the whole matter ? You admit, that there are “staggering difficulties which oppress us,” with which it is vain to strive ; you confess to a “heavy load of troubled speculation which weighs us down,” which to the sensitive and thoughtful “outweighs the pressure of the most extreme personal sufferings,” and which drives the earnest and reflecting wellnigh to the very brink of despair ;—and then in philosophic mood calmly acknowledge that this bitter root of mental distress and anguish was left unnoticed almost, and certainly unmedicated, by Him of whom you boast as the Great and Able Physician. And your only solace is the one borrowed from the fatalist and the atheist, that what little bits of comfort you can pick up is as much as is to be had “*in the nature of things.*” And if this is not enough, console yourself with the thought, that you are, perhaps, as well off as the best of your brother creatures. Is this the climax of Theism and of Christianity ?

Theologus.—When an individual’s thoughts and sentiments are in disorder and mutual conflict, it is a serious evil. When a man’s meditations upon the grandest and most important themes are antagonistic and self-contradictory, the more sensitive and reflecting his mind, the

¹ Restoration of Belief, pp. 371–373.

more intolerable will he feel the burden ; the more poignant the anguish. It seems to be an undoubted fact, that through this excruciating ordeal some of the finest spirits of our race have age after age been observed to pass. It is well to know precisely the cause of such a painful and general phenomenon. That we are beset with mysteries, cannot account for it. That our consciousness deceives us, only makes the darkness deeper still, and utterly hopeless. That men's opinions are contradictory, arises from the circumstance of our being involved in many erroneous beliefs, in consequence of our own and our fathers' guilt.

There is an obvious and adequate reason to account for the fact, that the Lord Jesus does not *directly* notice or meet the difficulty in question. God in his dealings towards men seems to act on the principle of parsimony. He never affords extraordinary means for the accomplishment of an end, which may be accomplished by ordinary means. The painful confusion and contradiction of thought which prevail among reflecting men is an evil, which can be corrected by reason itself. The resources of the understanding, independently of any special revelation or direct supernatural aid in addition to what the gospel provides for us as fallen creatures, are of themselves sufficient, when diligently and properly employed, to clear away the intellectual mists which perplex and bewilder us ; and, therefore, these collisions of thought formed no proper subject for the direct teaching or immediate interposition of the great Prophet of mankind.

Origen.—By what means then can men deliver themselves from the burden of their conflicting thoughts, and avoid the entanglements of self-contradiction?

Theologus.—By choosing to be in ignorance, rather than in error; and preferring “a prudent nescience” to a false knowledge.

Celsus.—But people do not like to be found in ignorance, and are ashamed to profess it.

Theologus.—To wish to *appear* what we *are not* is hypocritical; and it is only a morbid modesty that blushes to acknowledge a normal or proper ignorance.

Origen.—Men won’t distinguish between a commendable and a culpable ignorance.

Theologus.—Men are constantly making the distinction in daily life. Those who refuse to observe it in religion must bear the consequences.

Origen.—What a revolution it would produce in our philosophies, if our learned men ceased to be dogmatic when they should suspend their judgment!

Celsus.—What a revolution would the application of the same rule effect in the Christian community!

Origen.—Well, no doubt, Christians are often too hasty in forming their judgment, and plead a conscientious conviction in defence of a rash decision. But our creeds and confessions are always held in subordination to the word of God; and we cannot go wrong in following the Bible.

Celsus.—May you not go wrong in interpreting the Bible? Moreover, your creeds and confessions are in

great measure a theological reflection of different philosophical schools. The charge, therefore, which you brought against philosophers resiles upon theologians. Moreover, not to speak of the ambiguities and doubtful assertions which Christian creeds certainly contain, how many a young or half-instructed man is called upon to pronounce a solemn and dogmatic assertion on points, on which a suspense of judgment would be more manly and reasonable.

Theologus.—It is not only in the improper use of ecclesiastical symbols, that this evil manifests itself. That man is prone to swallow a contradiction, rather than stand silent and humble before a mystery—ready to profess a knowledge and belief in any thing, and assign the shallowest reason for his belief, rather than delay decision while diligently and candidly seeking the truth, is evident in a thousand forms. Even in those Christian societies where there is no authoritative or recognised creed, there may sometimes be found a stereotyped mass of sentiment, which answers many of the purposes of a creed, and which may also entail more serious evils. In all classes of society, and in all the affairs of men, we find this intellectual malady. The prevalence of premature judgments, unauthorised decisions, and crude sentiments, is an evil both general and inveterate. Nor is it lessened, because it is so commonly concealed, or palliated, or defended, under various pretences, such as patriotism, philanthropy, and religion. Men would surely, if not speedily, extricate themselves from the most painful and

perplexing of their inconsistencies, if they would use their understanding, as they use their feet, and follow the prudent maxim of Burke :—" where he did not see his way clearly, he would tread cautiously."

In making some of the above statements, our design may be misunderstood. It is not to overthrow, or destroy, but to remove " those things that are shaken, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain." In the creeds of the churches, written and unwritten, there is much invaluable truth in which all are agreed, but to make this agreement manifest a winnowing process is required. In building up the Christian Evidences, *scientifically*, or rather in collecting materials for such a building, much, very much has been well and validly done, though the structure is by no means complete. And if some readers have thought us tardy in expressing our respect for the men whose works we have ventured to criticise, it is not because we have not felt such emotion deeply. Christian advocates and Christian arguments have so much solid truth on their side, that they pass with advantage through the most rigorous sifting and the severest purgation. We *do* wish " the wood and the hay and the stubble " to be burnt up ; but *nothing more*. Our motto is, Onward.

DIALOGUE V.

PRACTICAL AND SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGES.

Theologus.—As to the distinction between practical and scientific or speculative views, is it not one, which is frequently resorted to by the advocates of Christianity?

Origen.—We do indeed adduce scientific or dogmatic proof. “But, after all, to use the weighty words of Dr Arnold, ‘the real proof is the practical one; that is, let a man live on the hypothesis of its falsehood, the practical result will be bad; that is, a man’s besetting and constitutional faults will not be checked; and some of his noblest feelings will be unexercised, so that if he be right in his opinions, truth and goodness are at variance with one another, and falsehood is more favourable to our moral perfection than truth; which seems the most monstrous conclusion which the human mind can possibly arrive at.’”¹

Celsus.—If I understand your statement aright, it amounts to this: that the practical and best evidence in favour of Christianity consists in an individual’s acting upon its principles, or on the supposition that it is true,

¹ Infidelity, by Pearson, p. 38.

and that the reasonableness and sufficiency of this evidence is manifested by the fact, that whoever acts upon the supposition of its falsehood is reduced to the monstrous conclusion that truth and goodness are opposed to each other. Admitting the force of this reasoning, it will be necessary to find a clear and satisfactory answer to

these three questions: 1. How shall we distinguish practical from scientific evidence? 2. Is the practical evidence or proof sufficient of itself, independently of the scientific? and, 3. If so, what additional or specific advantages follow from the scientific proof?

Theologus.—It is perfectly fair and most necessary that these three questions should be distinctly answered. This much will be conceded by all, that anything that deserves the name of practical proof, must be such, as to be appreciable by the mass of mankind, without literary lore or scientific research, and if there be no such practical evidence in favour of the Christian religion, or if this evidence by itself be not reasonable in its nature and sufficient in quantity, the Christian belief of the common people must be regarded as unintelligent and blind.

Celsus.—It was just now asserted that “the real proof is the practical one.” Does this mean that by itself it is sufficient and reasonable?

Origen.—“The external and internal evidences of Christianity constitute a mass of proof fully sufficient to justify our belief in its truths; and, as if aware of the force of it, our modern infidels attack one part of it, and •

represent us as if resting on that, to the exclusion of the rest." ¹

Historical evidence *Celsus*.—Nay, my friend, it is not we
—Is it practical? who do so alone, but the author from whom
you quote does so, when he says that "the *real* proof is
the practical one." That many Christians rest on part
of the proof which is offered by others, to the exclusion
of the rest, or independently of the rest, is notorious.
Some illustrations of this fact have occurred in this dis-
cussion, and many more might be given. For example,
not a few have asserted that the historical evidence is
the sheet-anchor of your cause,—that it, and it alone,
is sufficient. Is it, then, scientific or practical? If it be
the only satisfactory and impregnable proof, and yet be
not practical, but scientific, the faith of the common people
is nothing better than superstition.

Origen.—"What means this constant insinuation, that
historical evidence must be wholly without value to men
not learned in history? Is it not manifestly the senti-
ment of our nature—a sentiment so common and rooted
as to seem to be instinctive, that there is a credibility in
historical testimony, even as relating to the mass of man-
kind, sufficient to bring the remote past into a certain and
living connection with the present? Not only is it a fact,
that the least learned are influenced by historical testi-
mony as truly, if not as immediately, as the most learned,
but it is manifestly a law of Providence that it should be
so; and it remains to be shewn why the law which em-

¹ Infidelity, p. 330.

braces testimony to this effect concerning Cromwell or Alfred, should not embrace testimony to the same effect concerning Paul and Esaias.”¹

Celsus.—These statements are not precisely to the point in hand. It is freely granted that “there is a credibility in historical testimony, even as relating to the mass of mankind, sufficient to bring the remote past into a certain and living connection with the present.” The question is, what is the nature of that connection? It is admitted by you, that the unlearned are influenced by historical testimony, not directly but only mediately; is that medium such as to be within the reach of the masses, and is it such as will bear the pressure that is laid upon it? Is the knowledge which a working man can attain of Cromwell and Alfred, to use your own illustration, so precise and authentic, as to be able to support all the weight of his duty to God, and of his everlasting interests? The question is this: Are the historical evidences of Christianity so palpable and accessible as to be within the cognizance of the unlettered commonalty, and that in such a shape as to form a reasonable and sure foundation for their religious belief? Besides, if there be a practical evidence real and sufficient independently of the historical evidence, as is often maintained, why the frequent effort to make out that the historical is indeed practical proof?

Origen.—“BELIEF and HISTORY God has joined, nor shall man, to the end of time, succeed in effecting a divorce. Religion, disjoined from History, is a flickering candle,

¹ Infidelity, p. 186.

held in the hand of one who looks back upon utter darkness behind him, and looks into the blackness of darkness in front of him.”¹

Celsus.—These remarks are somewhat loose, and therefore of little argumentative value. Please to explain yourself more at length.

Origen.—“ Culture has much to do with that faculty of the understanding on which history lays a firm hold. Apart from a certain amount of culture, we do not find that history, as a reality past, comes home to the intellectual consciousness. Hence springs a disadvantage attaching, in the nature of things, to the labours of those who aim to impart an historic belief to the masses of the people, in the way of *definite proof*. The process finds an indispensable quality wanting in those who are the subjects of it; hence too, of course, comes that poor advantage which is snatched at by those whose aim it is to loosen an historic belief from the minds of the same classes. There is nothing of arrogance in what is here alleged.”²

Celsus.—According to this representation of the case, I can conceive of an *intelligent* martyrdom in the primitive age of Christianity among the uninstructed classes of society, but I perceive no room for such a martyrdom among the same classes in later times.

Origen.—How so?

Celsus.—State the ground which supported, as you suppose, the primitive martyrs in their fiery trial.

Origen.—“ The ground of that Christian fortitude

¹ Restoration of Belief, p. 14.

² *Ib.* p. 17.

which, in the end, prevailed over the polytheism of the State, was a BELIEF toward a PERSON; it was not an opinion as to a doctrine: and here we should take care to distinguish between the various motives that might come in to sustain the courage of a martyr in his extremity of suffering, and the ONE GROUND on which his constancy rested. Considerations of personal honour, or the fear of eternal punishment, or other motives, would have shewn little intrinsic force, if they had rested upon an opinion: their power sprang from their connection with a definite historic belief.”¹

Celsus.—Well, then, if “a definite historic belief” be the “one ground” of an intelligent martyrdom, how can a martyrdom of this character be found among the mass of modern professing Christians, when the very “process of imparting an historic belief to them finds in them an indispensable quality wanting?”

Origen.—“In all departments of knowledge it is the RESULTS that are for the many; but the PROCESS through which results have been reached are for the few. Especially must it be so in the departments of history and criticism. Results may be rendered into the vernacular; and when thus translated they become public property. Processes of inquiry are carried forward in symbol, and these signs always imply that a knowledge is already possessed, ten times outmeasuring that to which the bare symbol gives expression. The imperfectly educated suffer no real damage on this ground, so long as they are

¹ Restoration of Belief, pp. 77, 78.

not tampered with by sophists. Where the Press, the Pulpit, the Platform, the Class-room, are quite free, popular incompetency, as to matters of science or of learning, as it cannot be much abused by the privileged, so should it not be wrought upon, flattered, and cajoled by ambitious declaimers.”¹

Celsus.—These statements reveal distinctly the difficulty which I have been endeavouring to explain. It is maintained, that the historical evidences are the most, if not the only, available and valid proof, and that, of course, they are practical and popular; while at the same time it appears that there is a “popular incompetency,” in dealing with these evidences; and that “the imperfectly educated suffer no real damage on this ground,” *only* “so long as they are not tampered with by sophists.” It is mere trifling to tell us, that this “popular incompetency” “*should not* be wrought upon, flattered, and cajoled by ambitious declaimers.” When it *is* so wrought upon, what are the people to do? Is the following apostolical injunction *not* addressed to the common people, or has it been recently repealed:—“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God?”

Origen.—These things cannot be altered, and “the inference hence resulting is just this—that, knowing these things, the well-informed, the honestly-intending, the seriously-minded, will scorn the easy triumph of trampling in the dust the Religious Belief of the people—the uneducated and the half-educated.”²

¹ Restoration of Belief, p. 18.

² *Ib.* p. 20.

Celsus.—And this is the conclusion of the whole matter—"it is an *easy* triumph to trample in the dust the Religious Belief of the people!" Is this not quite as bad in your estimation as what the German philosophy says about the blind and unintelligent faith of the masses?

Theologus.—It thus appears, that what are generally known as the historical evidences of Christianity are not so patent to the popular mind, as to form by themselves a sure and reasonable ground of their belief. Before proceeding to inquire, is there no such practical evidence? it may be well to ask, what is the *scientific* value of the historical evidences?

Historical Evidence—how far scientific?

Origen.—It will not be doubted that "history is solid ground; or, to exclude exceptions, let us say that, within the region it embraces, perfectly solid ground is discoverable in all directions."¹

Celsus.—Explain what you mean by "solid ground."

Origen.—Solid ground is manifest, "when certain historic positions are brought into comparison, as to their demonstrative value, with any assumed principles of abstract science (not mathematical). It is certain that the Normans brought the Saxons under their sway in the eleventh century; but it is questionable whether a chivalrous race will always succeed in vanquishing an agricultural and a trading people."²

Celsus.—Strictly speaking, the certainty of history, as

¹ Restoration of Belief, p. 16.

² Ib. p. 16.

history, lies *wholly* in its *facts*. Religious Belief includes the *ought*, as well as the *is*. But you can never deduce *what ought to be* solely from *the things that are or have been*. The question may be stated otherwise, thus:—If miracles, looked upon merely as works of power, be sufficient in themselves to establish the truth of Christianity, then your historical evidences may be symmetrical and strictly scientific. But if the structure of your religion be made to rest upon miracles only in conjunction with certain moral principles or spiritual congruities, then, till these principles or congruities be stated and vindicated in a scientific form, your proof is, of course, to be regarded as scientifically incomplete. Either the whole weight of Christianity rests upon its miracles alone, or whatever else is associated with miracles to support your religion has to be logically expounded.

Origen.—I am aware that many eminent men take the one side of this alternative, and many as eminent take the other.

Celsus.—So here again there is a vital and fundamental contradiction among the defenders of Christianity! Which side do you take?

Origen.—"I can imagine myself to have so profound a sense of primary moral truths, as that miracles would be confluent with the deep movements of the soul, and would produce no surge."¹ "The miracles of the evangelic history come to us with the force of CONGRUITY, just so far as we can bring ourselves morally within the

¹ Restoration of Belief, p. 224.

splendour of those eternal verities which are of the substance of the Gospel.”¹ “Throughout the epistles (of the New Testament) morality is made to rest upon the solid basis of universal and permanent religious considerations.”² The writers of these epistles “do not throw the stress of any ethical argument upon the supernatural attestations of their message.”² “It is my steadfast conviction that Christianity will not henceforth maintain its ground, as related to the present intellectual condition of instructed communities, so long as ‘Christian apologists’ (so called) take up a position upon the ‘out-works,’ or spend their efforts upon the well-meant but fruitless endeavour to put forward the ‘Historic Evidences,’ apart from that PRINCIPAL TRUTH, which forms the substance of the Gospel. So long as this Principal Truth does not occupy its due position in the mind and faith of the writer, and so long as it is not boldly presented to the mind of the reader, there is a consciousness, on both sides, of an interior incoherence in the system itself: there is a painful and perplexing feeling of incongruity, which sets these evidences a jarring, as well in a logical as in a moral sense, one against another.”³

Celsus.—Very good. It is abundantly obvious, then, that till this Principal Truth be not only found, but found to be “a truth;” till “the solid basis of universal and permanent religious considerations” be laid bare to inspection; till the “eternal verities which are of the

¹ Restoration, p. 224.

² *Ib.* pp. 173, 174.

³ *Ib.* p. 317.

substance of the Gospel," or "primary moral truths," be investigated, and stated and vindicated, the historic evidences must be considered as *scientifically* incomplete; and you are necessarily driven in defence of Christianity to speculative or ethical Philosophy.

Origen.—God forbid; for, "however abundant may be the means available for constructing a Theistic Doctrine, and however irresistibly conclusive the argument may be on this ground, yet, if we rigidly deduct from it, as we ought, all aids and materials that are due, directly or indirectly, to the Hebrew and Christian canonical books, we then find ourselves in an undefended—an indefensible position as towards the very darkest of those surmises which take their rise from that spectacle of misery and disorder which the human family has everywhere, and has always, presented. On *this* road, has not the Terminus been reached long ago? If it were required of us "to report progress" in the department of Abstract Philosophy, let me be told whether, as honest men, we could affirm that those who profess to shake off every restraint of theological bias and religious prejudice, have at length reached a scientific position, which is so solidly based, and which is so well defined, as that it commands the assent, and may boast the adherence of all well-constituted and disciplined minds? If there be any such Philosophy which is now available as a resting-place for the human mind, it must surely be easy to name it. No such Philosophy can be named."¹

¹ Restoration, pp. 318, 319.

Celsus.—But it is unquestionable that till such a Philosophy can be named your historical argument is defective and inconclusive on your own shewing. You have reduced yourself to the necessity of travelling on *this* road, and if the Terminus be already reached, and be so dark and dreadful as you have represented it to be, Christianity should no longer refuse to shake hands with infidelity as her sister and friend.

Theologus.—It is a mere gratuitous assumption, to say that the Terminus has been reached,—that men can achieve no more than has been already done in the field of abstract thought or ethical science. It is another illustration of the fallacy, which reasons from what has been done in moral questions, to what might have been done, or what ought to be done, or what may yet be achieved. There is, and there can be, no resource against philosophical scepticism, but in the satisfactory establishment of the Fundamental Principles of human belief. If this work is not yet performed, it must be done; and the sooner the better.

Origen.—"You will not tell me that a consciousness is unreal, merely because I fail in my endeavours to give it intelligible expression, or indeed to put it into words at all. Do not the uncultured minds around us possess a genuine consciousness, as to moral principles, in behalf of which, either to explain or to defend them, they would not have a word to say?"¹

Celsus.—You are now away from the scientific argu-

¹ Restoration, p. 226.

ment, and taking refuge in the practical. You are abandoning the position which the same author thus marks out:—"The earliest developed of the beneficial results of an outburst of Infidelity is this, that it compels intelligent Christian men to look anew to the ground on which they stand, to sift the 'Evidences,' and thus to regain logical possession of their religious persuasion."¹ Here, then, it is distinctly avowed that your controversy with us tends to enable you to regain in another form what you already possessed. You were persuaded of the truth of Christianity before you ever listened to an infidel argument. Your investigation of these arguments does not shake your faith, but gives you a logical possession of that faith. Now, we have just seen that a logical possession of that faith implies a knowledge not only of certain historical facts, but of certain "primary moral truths" also. And when we ask for a logical statement of these primary moral truths, we are referred, on the one hand, to the dense and troubled darkness of Abstract Philosophy, and on the other hand, to the misty vagueness of the popular consciousness. Is this not an evasion?

Origen.—Let us, then, take the practical view of the case.

Celsus.—You cannot do so, without ad-
Practical Evidence. journaling, for the time being, its scientific aspect; and in doing so, we beg to recall your attention to the three questions proposed in the earlier part of this dialogue.

¹ Restoration, p. 247.

Origen.—"Those of our convictions upon which we are accustomed to act with the most unhesitating confidence, and to which we commend ourselves without fear, when life itself, or estate, is at risk, are *not*, or seldom are, those which we may obtain by processes of catenary deduction; or by a course of reasoning which, in a technical sense, is logical. It is not so. Man, such as we find him, on the beaten road of real life, is no such syllogistic automaton, as that he should bring propositions in threes to bear upon the business and conduct of every day. Pedants do this, and break their heads in consequence."¹

Celsus.—Ha! So you think some other men break their heads as well as infidels? What, then, is your practical reason for being a Christian—a reason, which shall stand clear and independent of all learned lumber and misty abstractions, and which shall be palpable and satisfactory to an untutored mind?

Origen.—"It is on no ground of its abstract credibility, that this fundamental fact of the Christian life (the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus) is accepted by those in whom that life has indeed had its commencement. As to those of them who are informed and intelligent, they can at all times fall back upon that body of evidence which secures them against disbelief. But going far beyond any such merely intellectual persuasion, Christ's true disciples have a sense of the import of His resurrection, which renders them, except as towards others, indif-

¹ Restoration, pp. 220, 221.

ferent to logical methods of proof. Ask them for a reason of their faith, and they can well meet the challenge; but having done so, they retire to a ground of consciousness, concerning which no distinct conveyance can be made from mind to mind, through the medium of language. Verbal propositions do not represent those intuitions within the circle of which this conviction takes place.”¹

Celsus.—If I understand the statements which you have adduced, they amount to this, that the true and powerful reason why a man becomes a Christian is to be found, not in “processes of catenary deduction,” but in a “sense,” or feeling, which renders believers, so far as they are themselves concerned, “indifferent to logical methods of proof.” An individual becomes a Christian, not by “bringing propositions in threes to bear upon the business,” but on “a ground of consciousness concerning which no distinct conveyance can be made from mind to mind, through the medium of language.” A Christian belief is a “conviction” taking place among “intuitions,” which “verbal propositions do not represent.” If nothing more than this can be said, you only exchange a “syllogistic” for a superstitious “automaton.”

Origen.—I shall now quote from another author, who, I hope, will be able to answer your inquiries.

Celsus.—Well, then, does he acknowledge the distinction between the practical and the scientific; and the independence and sufficiency of the former?

Origen.—Yes. For example, he remarks, “on specu-

¹ Restoration, pp. 344, 345.

lative grounds, it is impossible to establish a theory of either freedom or necessity; but, on practical grounds, there are reasons of the strongest kind for believing that man is really free and able to originate from himself.”¹

Celsus.—But this does not appear to be a case where the distinction, as properly understood, applies. His reasoning is to this effect, that we accept free-will as a fact—but a fact which we cannot explain. Now whenever we attempt to explain this fact, we look at it scientifically; and when in common life we act under the conviction that we ourselves and our neighbours are responsible, we take the fact practically. As a fact, it does not rest on practical grounds alone, but, like every other fact, on grounds common to practice and to speculation.

Difference between Practice and Speculation.

Theologus.—The proper distinction between practical and scientific knowledges seems to be this: *Practical knowledge is knowledge of an object in its relations to our own personal interests. Speculative or scientific knowledge is knowledge of an object in its relations to other objects generally.*

Origen.—In this sense the author referred to acknowledges the distinction in religion. He says, “We have endeavoured to estimate the argument from the idea of God in human nature. It conveys truth to the ignorant, but cannot give scientific knowledge till it has been established on general principles.”² Again, he remarks, “We

¹ Christian Theism, vol. i. pp. 267, 268.

² *Ib.* vol. ii. p. 278.

are to investigate the reasons of this belief, — reasons which, before examination, have their influence on the mind.”¹

Celsus.—Very well. The important question has now to be considered: Is the truth which is conveyed to the ignorant, while yet it is not “established on general principles,” and has not assumed the form of “scientific knowledge”—*real* truth? Can it be depended upon and vindicated as such? If not, what is its value? Are the reasons of your faith which influence your mind, before a scientific examination of them, valid apart from that examination? And if they are valid, how shall we know that they are valid and good?

Origen.—Certainly they are to be regarded as good and valid. For we do not “speak of the Existence of the Supreme Being as a truth which can reasonably be called in question. It is a truth as natural to the mind as the existence of itself or of an outward world, and cannot be represented as doubtful, but by the same audacity of scepticism.”² “Speculative inquiries are not to be evaded, by assuming the result of any system as received. Yet need we not, on this account, either despair of philosophy, or regard the great truth of theology as hanging in uncertainty, till philosophers have agreed upon their principles.”³ “It is one which no inquiry can unsettle, no scrutiny can invalidate.”⁴

Celsus. — But the same author virtually abandons

¹ Christian Theism, vol. i. p. 14.

² *Ib.* vol. i. p. 43.

³ *Ib.* p. 29.

⁴ *Ib.* p. 26.

these positions, when he says: "Man may know by the teaching of nature: he cannot know that he knows without reflection. He needs philosophy to estimate the value of his cognitions, and to give them currency."¹ Our practical knowledge is worthless unless we know that it is valid. That it is not valid, is plainly implied in the following statement. "It is impossible to establish the great truth of the Being of God on a firm basis, without investigating the principles of reason and the limits of knowledge, and examining the procedure of the mind in its acquirement of truth."² If this be correct, "the great truth of theology" must be regarded "as hanging in uncertainty, till philosophers have agreed upon their principles."

Origen.—But "if strict proof be impossible, we may expect that it can be shewn to be impossible, and may see good reason to be satisfied without it. If we have moral reasons and practical proofs, we may perhaps know them to be such as the case admits of, and may find them to be as convincing on this subject as exact demonstration in geometry."³

Celsus.—It appears, then, that this author admits a practical knowledge, as well as a speculative. When he speaks of the latter, he disparages, and even in some instances invalidates, the former. Then when the philosophic argument leads him into unfathomed depths and unsettled controversies, he retires back for support upon

¹ Christian Theism, vol. i. pp. 29, 30. ² *Ib.* pp. 8, 9, see p. 292.

³ *Ib.* pp. 9, 10.

practical proofs. At one time, the practical evidence seems in his estimation to be all in all, but anon it must be supported and supplemented by scientific reflection. Again, it seems as if religion were nought till vindicated by philosophy, and when philosophy is rather difficult to manage, then the reader is treated with a popular demonstration.

Theologus.—There is, undoubtedly, too much of this vicious reasoning in almost all the writers of the day. If the practical evidence in favour of religion be insufficient or invalid, then the faith of the common people must be blind and superstitious. If it be sufficient and valid, then every disbeliever will be guilty, and may be easily convinced of sin. If the scientific evidence be yet incomplete, there is no loss sustained in making the acknowledgment, and there is work to fill the hands of our reflecting men. But to confound the two together, and to be constantly shifting ground from the one to the other, —to profess to be scientific in order to be reasonable, and then be content to be practical because our science breaks down, is as injurious to Christianity as it is degrading to the understanding.

Celsus.—A defence of religion, then, which ignores the practical evidence altogether, must in your estimation be very imperfect; since it professedly rests the weight of religion upon the scientific evidence, which is difficult to be understood, even though it were in every respect satisfactory.

Theologus. — This is unhappily the case with the

volume entitled "Theism;" so that its author *virtually* acknowledges that the faith of the common people is destitute in their minds of a reasonable foundation. His theme certainly calls upon him to vindicate the faith of unlettered men; and this he has not even attempted to do.

Origen.—It is scarcely correct to say, that he has entirely overlooked the practical aspect of the question. In a note he remarks, that if reason were taken in a certain sense, it and faith "would be clearly seen to form a unity of power, in which the whole soul, intellectually and practically, goes forth towards the truth."¹

Celsus.—This does not make the matter any better; for if his language has any meaning as regards the point immediately before us, it seems to imply, that what is practical is not intellectual, or something of that sort. If so, it denies intelligence in the belief of the uninstructed, which is just one of our favourite positions.

Origen.—Again, he observes: pantheism "may bid man live purely as reason dictates; but man, in his common life, is not governed by the clearness of his intellect, but by the rectitude of his affections and his will."²

Celsus.—This evidently means that there is a palpable distinction between intellectual clearness and the morality of common life. There is of course a plain distinction between moral rectitude on practical questions, and clearness of intellect on other questions not of a practical

¹Theism, p. 278.

²Ib. p. 374.

nature. But to suppose, as this author seems to do, that on the very same questions of practical morality there may be rectitude of the affections and will, and at the same time dimness and obfuscation of the intellect, is to reduce morality and religion to a contemptible superstition. We need ask no more for what you style infidelity. than what this author has conceded, that "it bids man live purely as reason dictates!!"

Origen.—Let me introduce to your notice a writer who formally announces, that he "has appealed from speculative dogmatism to undeniable facts and universally recognised principles."¹

Celsus.—I shall be glad to hear how he states the evidence; although it is obvious to those who read his work that his argument as a whole is addressed to the cultivated classes of society, and could not be appreciated by the unlettered and rude.

Origen.—He remarks, for example, "Any lengthened process of reasoning, if constituted the instrument of belief, would have limited the benefits of the supposed revelation to a very narrow minority. By far the greater portion of men are incapable of estimating evidence, the force of which depends upon a nice logical perception—and the very want of exercise which incapacitates them for close reasoning, indisposes them also to attempt it. Had it, therefore, been possible to authenticate Christ's mission by other and more elaborate proof than that supplied by miracles, there would still remain

¹ Bases of Belief, p. v. in the preface.

sufficient reason for resorting to the latter. They speak to men's convictions in intelligible and homely language. Their testimony requires no translation by the more intellectual to make its force felt by rude and uncultivated minds. Ignorant people, common people, busy people, can understand and appreciate it. And of such the world mainly consists."¹

Celsus.—So far well. But in this aspect of the case, the evidence of miracles is available only for those who witnessed them, or who lived near the time and place of their occurrence; certainly not for those who live centuries afterwards. To make it available for men now-a-days, historical criticism must be resorted to. Does not your author, accordingly, proceed to a disquisition on the historical evidences?

Origen.—No doubt he does.

Celsus.—How then does he supply for the present generation the evidence whose character he has so well described?

Origen.—He says, "assuming the facts (stated in the New Testament) to contain a divine revelation, that interpretation of their spiritual meaning which is found to be congruous with our religious consciousness may complete our conviction that we are rightly instructed in the mind of God. This congruity is, to a great extent, the ultimate basis of very much, if not most, of the actual belief existing in the Christian world."²

The Bible and
the conscience of
man.

¹ Bases of Belief, p. 189.

² *Ib.* p. 366.

Celsus.—But may not our religious consciousness mislead us, and be at fault?

Origen.—"Men are misled easily enough by sophistry, by assumption, by ecclesiastical authority, but seldom by the testimony of their religious consciousness that it has found a suitable object. 'He that *doeth* the will of my Father, shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God or not.' Yes! practical experience is a safer instructor in this school than theoretic certainty. As touching theological science, it may often be wrong—but as touching religious truth, it is for the most part right."¹

Celsus.—On this supposition, how do you account for the people asking Aaron to make the golden calf, and for the difficulty of converting heathen nations to Christianity? Your argument appears to be similar to an old maxim, *vox populi vox dei*; were it not completely invalidated by claiming for religious consciousness a semi-infallibility which is refused to the other faculties of the mind. Moreover, if you admit that this religious consciousness may err, even though it be but "seldom," and that it is right, not always, but only "for the most part," you acknowledge that it is really deceptive; and if it cannot be depended upon invariably, it cannot be depended upon at all.

Theologus.—The principles which have been already developed in this discussion enable us satisfactorily to meet these objections. The congruity or harmony between our religious consciousness and the Bible is a prac-

¹ Bases of Belief, p. 368.

tical argument in favour of Christianity, and is obviously available to all men. Its validity and reasonableness can be maintained, however, only on these conditions,—that by religious consciousness we mean the religious convictions of those *only* who *diligently* and *honestly* seek religious truth, and also that the convictions of men on *any point*, on which they diligently and honestly seek the truth, will not be erroneous.

Origen.—You have already stated the distinction between practical and speculative knowledge, namely, that the former regards its object in its relations to our own personal interests, and the latter regards its object in its general relations to other objects. How do you shew that the former is reasonable and valid without the latter?

Practical Evidence
of itself valid and
sufficient.

Theologus.—Many a man can build a theory on the principles of the differential calculus. This knowledge is *practical*, because it is within the reach of every man of common intelligence and care, and because it refers to a matter of daily advantage. This knowledge is *reasonable*, because animals destitute of the human understanding cannot build a bridge. This knowledge is *valid*, for the bridge answers the purpose of its construction.

Origen.—Please to state, then, the practical evidence in favour of Christianity.

Theologus.—It may be stated in various forms. One has been already given: The congruity and correspon-

dence between the statements of the Bible and the consciences of men; that is, of those men who are careful and candid in seeking the truth. This evidence is practical, because it is within the reach of all, and deals in matters bearing directly on the best interests of every man. It is reasonable, because without reason it cannot be appreciated. It is valid, because it leads to a conclusion of great and immediate advantage.

Origen.—Can you state this practical evidence in another form?

Theologus.—Here is a very satisfactory statement of it, which I shall transcribe from a hand-bill published for gratuitous circulation among the people.—“‘Well, Hodge,’ said a smart-looking Londoner to a plain cottager, who was on his way home from church, ‘so you are trudging home after taking the benefit of the fine balmy breezes in the country this morning.’ ‘Sir,’ said the man, ‘I have not been strolling about this sacred morning, wasting my time in idleness, and neglecting the duties of religion; but I have been to the house of God, to worship Him, and to hear His holy word.’ ‘Ah! what, you are one of those simpletons that, in these country places, are weak enough to believe the Bible. Depend upon it, my man, that book is nothing but a pack of nonsense; and none but weak and ignorant people now think it true.’ ‘Well, Mr Stranger, but do you know, weak and ignorant as we country people are, we like to have two strings to our bow?’ ‘Two strings to your bow! What do you mean by that?’ ‘Why, sir, I mean that to believe the Bible,

and act up to it, is like having two strings to my bow; for even should it turn out to be untrue, I shall have been a better and happier man in this world for living according to its dictates; and so it will be for my good in that respect—*there is one* string; and if it should prove true, it will be better for me in the world to come—*there is another* string; and a pretty strong one it is. But, sir, if you disbelieve the Bible, and on that account do not live as it requires, you have *not one* string to *your* bow. And, oh! if its tremendous threats prove true, think, oh think! what will become of you then?' This plain appeal to common sense silenced the gainsayer, and afforded proof that he was not quite so wise as he had supposed."

Origen.—But do you really maintain that such a clear and short cut to a conclusion so momentous is valid and satisfactory, even in the eye of hostile criticism?

Theologus.—Undoubtedly it is. What objection can be urged against it?

Origen.—Your conclusion in the above argument rests on a probability, not on a certainty. It is all made up of *ifs*.

Theologus.—To a great extent it is; but it is based upon a principle than which no one is more clear or certain in any of the sciences; namely, that in practical affairs men should avoid all risk, and invariably prefer the safe side. In the case before us, the principle is as unquestionable as its application.

Origen.—Is this nut-shell evidence of itself sufficient to bear the weight of martyrdom?

Theologus.—Why not? Is it not more reasonable, and manly, and noble, to lose our mortal life, than even *risk*, or expose to danger, our life eternal? We say not, however, that any martyr has been left to pass through a fatal ordeal sustained by this evidence alone.

Origen.—What advantages are obtained by making the practical evidence independent of the scientific, and by itself valid and sufficient?

Theologus.—The responsibility of the masses is maintained inviolate, and the faith of illiterate Christians is vindicated as intelligent and praiseworthy, against the insinuations and scoffs of learned pride and philosophic vanity. On no other principle can these all-important positions be consistently maintained.

Origen.—Is there any other advantage?

Theologus.—There is one other, of the very utmost importance. We are led, or rather forced, to a conclusion, in which we find ourselves entirely at one with the statements of the Bible and the sympathies of Christian men, namely, that whenever a decided neglect or rejection of the gospel of Christ is manifested, and an attempt made to excuse or justify this rejection or neglect, on abstruse speculative and critical grounds, the true source of this scientific error or speculative aberration is to be found in practical guilt.

Origen.—Does this conclusion hold good in other matters, when applied to them, as you have now applied it to Christianity?

Theologus.—Most certainly. The man who disregards

some well tried, practical maxim, out of deference to some speculative crotchet, in any of the affairs of life, it matters not what, is justly set down as a simpleton. Many thought that the impracticability of railroads and steam locomotives was demonstrated before they were constructed. To profess to believe in that demonstration now, is something the same as professing to reject the New Testament for philosophic reasons.

Origen.—If the practical evidence be in itself reasonable and sufficient, what need is there at all of scientific evidence?

Theologus. — What need is there of science in any other department of human life?

Origen.—Science is needed, for example, Advantages of philosophy. in astronomy and mechanics to rectify and increase our practical knowledge. But you will not assert that a scientific elaboration of the evidences or doctrines of Christianity will confer a similar advantage on practical religion?

Theologus. — If the assertion be properly explained and understood, we see no reason for shrinking from it, but many reasons for its adoption.

Origen.—Indeed, you surprise me. The apostle Paul says, “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit;” and you are directing us to philosophy for the improvement of our practical religion!

Theologus. — Do you suppose, that the apostle spoke thus of a *true* and *sound* philosophy? And you may

depend upon this, that if the right philosophy can do us no good, a wrong philosophy could do us no harm.

Origen. — The Bible, and the Bible alone, is the religion of Protestants. You are denying this, and asserting that without philosophy our religion is imperfect.

Theologus.—It is my object to show you how a man, as an *intelligent* and *responsible* being, can be a Christian without philosophy—a position which is rarely explained or defended in anything like a satisfactory manner in the mass of our Christian literature. And now when I affirm that the *full* development of the Christian life, individually and socially, is dependent upon the elaboration of critical and ethical philosophy, I am not leading you away from the Word of God. I am only affirming what seems to have been often proved, that a mature and proper interpretation of many portions of God's Word is reached only through scientific labours.

Origen. — Do you then draw the same distinction between *art* and *science* in religion, as in everything else?

Theologus.—Undoubtedly. Will you explain the distinction as it is held generally?

Origen.—Dr Whewell in his *Philosophy of the Inductive Sciences* says (v. ii. p. 205), “I have already endeavoured to shew, that the advance of the arts which give us a command over the powers of nature, is generally prior to the formation of exact and speculative knowledge concerning those powers. But art, which is thus the predecessor of science, is, among nations of acute and active intellects, usually its parent.”

Theologus.—There is in every art, even in its rudest state, some portion of true practical knowledge. The re-action of science upon any art in promoting its improvement does not consist in giving certainty to the true knowledge already involved in the practice of the art, but in adding to that knowledge. Thus savages in constructing the roughest raft to cross a river have undoubtedly *some amount of true knowledge*, which they turn to good account. Science, whatever improvements it may effect upon the raft, does not attempt to *rectify* that knowledge, but is based upon it;—does not enable man to do a different thing from what he did before, but to do the same thing more speedily, economically, and elegantly. Improvements in the arts of life by the discoveries of science do not give us new desires; they only stimulate and enlarge the desires common to human nature by multiplying and diversifying the means of their gratification.

True practical knowledge is sufficient for its own proper and proposed end, and is, therefore, final and satisfactory. The savage wishes to cross a river; his raft however rude answers this purpose. Speculative knowledge, on the other hand, even when true, always comes short of its own proposed and proper end; for its aim is to know to the utmost. That which is defective, when tested by its own avowed and inherent purpose, must be in some measure unsatisfactory. Since, then, we cannot but continually feel some deficiency or gap in our speculative attainments, it must be to the practical knowledge

of truth that the mind of man ought to look for genuine intellectual repletion and repose.

If there be no religious truth, or if that truth be unknown to men, then religious faith of any form or kind is only a mockery and a delusion. Religious faith should be nothing else but belief in religious truth, as the belief of astronomical truth might be called astronomical faith. If, then, there be such a thing as truth respecting the character of God which is known to men,¹ since it has both a speculative and a practical aspect, let this distinction be attended to, and let religion as an *art* be discriminated from religion as a *science*. The consistent application of this distinction would clear away several perplexities and expose some mischievous fallacies.

Origen.—Please to state some of these?

Practical religion independent of philosophy.

Theologus.—In the first place, *when philosophical views of religious truth are absent or confused or erroneous, practical views may be to some extent correct.* Religion as a science may be unknown, while religion as an art may not only exist, but exist as a *reasonable thing*, accomplishing its proposed end and giving satisfaction to the mind. To dis sever practical religious faith from science and philosophy and speculation of all sorts, is not only de-

¹ “Toute religion suppose deux choses : que les vérités qu’elle proclame sont des vérités absolues, et qu’elle les proclame au nom de Dieu même qui les lui révèle.”—Cousin. Cours de l’histoire de la philosophie moderne, vol iii. p. 333. It would have been well if Cousin had always attended to this statement.

sirable but absolutely necessary. But to dissever it from reason, from the understanding, or from truth, is a pure contradiction and a wide-spreading calamity.

Learned men, who never confound science and art in anything else, will confound them in religion. Cousin says that "philosophy is found among the masses under the naïve, deep, and admirable form of religion and worship. Christianity is the philosophy of the people." If this were only a play upon words, it would be unsuitable to a scientific page; for to identify practical religion with philosophy is either to deny the former to the mass of mankind, or to degrade and destroy the latter.

Celsus.—"Theology and religion are two widely different things. Theology implies a body of truth, founded upon indisputable principles, and having a connection capable of carrying our reason with it, running through all its parts. Religion, on the other hand, is the spontaneous homage of our nature, poured forth with all the fragrance of holy feeling into the bosom of the infinite. Religion may exist without a theology at all, properly so called. We may never have attempted to render account of a single theological idea; we may never have stepped out of the region of our purely spontaneous imaginations; we may be destitute of the least notion of the grounds on which our belief rests, and yet the deepest waters of our religious being may be stirred by the divine impulse upon the soul, and lead to all the noble results of a living and entire devotion to God."

Theologus.—This is plainly going to the other extreme,

dissociating practical religion from the understanding and from truth,—a grave error, which is as frequently found by implication, as in such explicit statements as the above. If “religion may exist without any theology at all,” and our belief be religious belief, while “we may be destitute of the least notion of the grounds on which our belief rests,” then all religions are equally true. To ignore in this manner the distinction between the true and the false, even though somewhat in a poetic strain, is bad philosophy, and worse religion. To dissociate in any such way as this practical religion from the objective truth and the subjective use of our understanding, and thus make all religions alike true or alike untrue, is to perpetrate a folly in the weightiest matter which is seldom witnessed even in trifles.

If a man holds any opinion, or observes any practice in religion, without reasons as sound and conclusive as he has for holding an opinion or observing a practice in any other matter—that religious opinion or practice, even though it be perfectly right regarded simply in itself, yet as held or observed by him is really superstitious or unreasonable. On the other hand, if a man has in defence of his religious views and conduct reasons, such as are considered satisfactory in all the other affairs of practical life, then his religion has a connection with truth as clear, intimate, and indissoluble, as is desirable, or as it is possible for any human action to have. To deny what might be called the specific identity between practical religion as an art, and all the other arts of

human life, or, in other words, to dissever our religious feelings or actions from the truth, and from the one faculty of our nature by which truth is known, is to ratify an eternal divorce between reason and religion, either making reason essentially irreligious, or religion essentially unreasonable. And it seems obvious that the man who is really irreligious or ungodly will be constantly seeking refuge in this error, in one or other of its numerous forms. For the ungodly man has perhaps no profession of religion at all, or his profession of it is a mere formality, or the religion which he professes is unreasonable, and consequently for such a one to admit that there is a true knowledge and real fear of God is virtually to condemn himself.

Origen.—You formerly gave a statement of the practical evidence in favour of the Christian religion; perhaps you might put it in another shape, and more in accordance with the train of thought into which we have been led.

Theologus.—It is impossible for any individual to prove that there is no God. It is, therefore, clearly the duty of men, even though ignorant of evidence certifying Divine existence, to live *as if* God did exist, trembling lest we should give Him offence, and employing every available means to dispel the darkness in which this incomparably momentous subject may be enveloped.

Let now a copy of the Bible be presented to an individual who is in this state of mind, and who, we shall suppose, knows nothing whatever respecting that book

but what he can learn from its own pages. He cannot read much of that singular volume without perceiving, that it claims for itself again and again the dignity and authority of a Divine message, while there are only very few statements in it which have any apparent tendency to throw discredit upon that claim. Whoever accordingly is disposed to act *as if* he had a Creator in heaven, will feel constrained, even after a cursory perusal of the Bible, *to act as if it were the word of God.*

It seems impossible for any man to read the Bible with the smallest degree of honest attention, without feeling that he is most unequivocally reduced to the necessity of choosing the one side or other of the following dilemma: either to reject and loathe it as the most arrogant and impious of forgeries, or to venerate and obey it *as if it were* a message from his Maker. If it be extravagant to assert that there is evidence to prove that God is not, it is no less extravagant to affirm that there is evidence to prove that the Bible is a forgery.

If a man will not *read* the Bible, he is like the simpleton, who on receiving a document *purporting* to be a letter from his father or his Sovereign, and to contain his title to a rich inheritance, throws it carelessly past, and leaves it unexamined, and its contents unthought of. The man who after perusing and examining the Bible just as any unlettered peasant is capable of doing, and who brings to the task the practical good sense which he carries with him to the market and the field, will feel

that since he cannot regard it as a mass of shameless sophistry, fit only to be burned, he is bound to reverence and submit to it as the oracle of God. Between these two courses reason does not allow us an inch of ground on which to stand. Whoever after examining the Christian Scriptures can pronounce them a work of darkness—a plot of hell, is not a man. Every nerve of our nature quivers, no less at the thought of pronouncing the Bible a base and blasphemous contrivance, than of pronouncing the assertion of Divine existence to be a lie. It is then *possible* at least, that God is, and that the Bible is his word. The individual, then, who is not indifferent to all hope of gain, or callous to all the pleadings of love, or dead to all sense of duty, will act as if the Bible were a rescript from his Maker ; while he knows no more than this ;—it is just possible that it may be so. Let it be remembered, that acting as if the Bible were the word of God implies, that we use our utmost endeavours to yield to all its statements attentive consideration, and to all its plain commands immediate, universal, and unconditional obedience.

Celsus.—But why should we *act as if* the Bible were the word of God, so long as we *doubt* that it *is* ?

Theologus.—In all abstract and theoretical questions, by which man's feelings are untouched and his welfare not directly involved, there is ample room for the mind to repose in a state of unbelief or simple doubt, midway as it were between affirmation and denial ; but is it so in the affairs of practical life ? When any one hears a

report that a new planet has been discovered, is he in the same state of mind as when he hears that his parent or his child is dying ? In the one case he can quietly remain in a state of suspense, neither knowing, nor caring to know, the correctness or incorrectness of the report ; but can he so act in the other case ? Human nature rises in all her dignity and power to protest against the enormity of dealing with the two reports in the same manner. The one we may leave unexamined ; the other we cannot. We not only feel that we must entertain it, but we immediately begin to act upon the assumption of its truth or of its falsehood. A man when he hears the report of any matter deeply affecting his interests, scrutinizes the information quickly and shrewdly as to whence and how it came, and forthwith decides, for he cannot but decide, upon its versimilitude or the contrary. If it appears to be entirely false, it may not alter his urgent previous arrangements for the next hour or the remainder of the day ; but if it seem to be true, it immediately and totally disturbs his present plans. By his action he thus unavoidably expresses some belief in the accuracy or inaccuracy of the report. In physics, unstable equilibrium is just possible ; but in practical business doubt or the equilibrium of the mind as to a momentous topic is such exquisite torture, that the man most legitimately seeks and finds certainty, and acts upon the finding.

Suspension of faith, when the case demands it, is one of the best characteristics of the philosophic temper of mind ; because without it no progress has ever been

made in discovering the secrets of the universe. But suspension of faith amid the substantial interests of daily life, at once impales the heart upon a stake of anguish and rivets upon the limbs fetters of iron. There is no healthy, happy, and successful man in any department of business, who does not change by the very instincts of his nature, every phantom of uncertainty that flits across his path, into a living and positive certainty for the time being, while he makes preparation to resist or evade its evil, or patiently labours or waits to enjoy its good. There is not in the page of history or in the record of passing events, a more common or correct sentiment than this : — “ Such an expectation had all the effect in anticipation which such an event would have had in reality.”

If any person hears a rumour that one of his relatives has died in a foreign land, and left him a considerable fortune, his doubts respecting the truth of the report will have an influence somewhat similar to what his knowledge of its falsehood would have. A prudent individual placed in such circumstances will not abandon his usual occupation, or indulge in expensive luxuries, till he has attained reliable information. He will make all possible inquiry ; but he will run no risk. Since his acting as if the report were true would entail shame and sorrow in the event of its turning out to be false, he will act as if it were false so long as the uncertainty continues. This resolution is confirmed by the reflection which will occur to most minds, that in the event of his hopes being real-

ized he will lose nothing by the exercise of patience and delay. We may, therefore, say, that, while unbelieving or doubting, he acts as if he disbelieved or denied the report.

Again, if evil be anticipated, even on very slight grounds, men act as if it were really coming. A small expenditure can often make sufficient provision to meet a threatened danger, which, if it were encountered without preparation, would produce serious loss or absolute ruin. The probability that plague will invade the land, leads in well ordered states to as many exertions and precautions as would the certain knowledge of its approach. Inaction being in this case hazardous, men act on the barest presumption. Of all such instances it may be said, that men while doubting act as if they believed.

Hence we conclude, that when acting on a probability incurs much risk and avoids none, men abstain from acting till they know the certainty. But when acting on a probability incurs no risk and avoids much, men act even while the certainty is unknown. *In practical questions, therefore, there is no such state of mind as may properly be called unbelief, doubt, or uncertainty. When such a state of mind might be expected, it immediately and invariably resolves itself into certainty, under the form of belief or disbelief.*

Origen.—These remarks seem to explain and vindicate such Scripture sentiments as these:—"The friendship of the world is enmity with God." "He that is not

with me is against me." Not to love God is to hate God. Admitting, now, that you have shewn the independence of practical religion upon philosophy, how can you substantiate your opinion that practical religion may be improved by philosophy?

Practical religion may be improved by more rudimental forms, are independent philosophy.

Theologus.—The arts of life, in their of the sciences, while yet the sciences develop and improve the arts. So in religion. While a life of piety is attainable without philosophy, we have no reason to expect a full and proper manifestation of individual and social piety without philosophical or scientific advancement. *This, then, is our second remark in reference to the distinction between religion as a science and as an art, that its improvement as a science will lead to its improvement as an art.*

Let the question be proposed, in regard to those who have emerged from ignorance and error on the most momentous topics, and had the burden of their guilt removed by belief in the gospel, and are pressing onwards toward unbeclouded knowledge and unswerving rectitude,—by what means may their progress be facilitated, and may they be enabled to surmount difficulties, and disencumber themselves of impediments? It does not seem unlikely that among other means to be employed, an analysis and elucidation of the first principles of all knowledge and belief may be found to be profitable. Or rather, is it not apparent that this work must be done, and along with it the science of morality developed and

matured before we can expect to approximate to moral perfection?

Are there not many problems of great moment in human life, individual and social, on which wise and good men are found not only at variance, but in direct antagonism? These religious and moral contradictions, which perplex every upright mind, and bring many evils on society, cannot be resolved into a mere harmless and unavoidable diversity of sentiment, nor can they be accounted for on the supposition that the opposing parties disagree, not in their principles, but only in the application of them. Though this last difference might be calamitous enough, yet it is notorious, that men who in most of their conduct shew themselves to be of generous and exalted minds are widely and painfully opposed to each other on several very important religious and ethical questions. For example, one party affirms that *it is* the duty of the government of a country to undertake the responsibility of securing the education of the young, and the instruction of the adult members of the community in religion, while another party affirms that it is *not* duty, but a transgression. Who can estimate the amount of national evil springing from this contrariety?

How often, also, are good men perplexed about the path of duty which they themselves should follow? This perplexity, moreover, terminates, not always in a conviction that the path chosen, even after anxious deliberation, is the right one absolutely; and the only satisfaction left to their consciences is the reflection, that they have

adopted, in the pressure of events, what to the best of their knowledge was the right one. But surely it admits of doubt whether the condition of moral perfection will allow of painful distraction in the mind, respecting the proper course of action in any possible combination of circumstances. Nor can it be conceded that a *thoroughly* virtuous agent may choose what is really wrong under the conviction that it is right. But how frequently have individuals, that have attained the utmost purity and intelligence within the present reach of man, had to regret that the path which they have followed, after the most careful consideration which they could at the time bestow, has led them astray. And though the fact that they have done their best preserves them from the bitterer remorse of conscience, the other fact, that notwithstanding they have done their best they have erred, cannot but be regarded as indicative of some serious defect in human character, or some strange anomaly in human affairs.

That this imperfect and unsatisfactory state of matters is not to continue always, that it admits of some amelioration, and that the moral and religious condition of society is not stationary and stereotyped, but progressive, every one most cordially believes. If, then, advancement is to be made, if human nature in its individual and social developments is to be rectified and improved, and if any approximation to the grand and final issue is to be achieved in the direction now specified, how, or by what means, is it to be accomplished?

That an improved philosophy is one of these means seems very highly probable. Without it to expect the maturer and more lovely fruits of virtue to appear, is unwarranted either by the statements of Sacred Scripture or by the experience of mankind. If correct knowledge has uniformly conferred power, and if man believes that it must always do so, then it cannot be doubted, that the loose and undefined notions respecting some prominent points of human duty prevalent in the mass of even christianized society, along with the unsettled controversies bristling on the pages of our best ethical and religious treatises, form too sure a symptom of moral lassitude and spiritual weakness.

The assertion that the study of philosophy is to be regarded as one means to meet and counteract this deeply seated and wide-spread evil, will excite the alarms of some who may be found exclaiming, Christianity is the alone remedy for the mental maladies of humanity, and "Christianity is a fixed not a floating thing."

Far be it from us to advocate any change in the knowledge necessary to the exercise of responsibility, or in the knowledge respecting the fundamental relations between God and man, as if the conditions of man's acceptance with God, or the primary laws of social existence, were liable to vicissitudes from age to age. If it be absurd to assert or insinuate, that a written revelation from the Most High, after such a revelation has been actually vouchsafed, is not absolutely necessary and highly beneficial, it seems not less absurd to maintain, that the *main*

import of the heavenly message, its *chief* and *weightiest* lessons were not understood by those who in primitive times honestly perused the Word of God, or that they cannot be understood by any, even among the rudest of mankind, who in succeeding ages shall read it attentively. Nor can anything be more unreasonable or impious, than the enormity which has been perpetrated in the name of reason, of eviscerating the Bible of the momentous meaning with which its pages are replete, robbing Christ Jesus of all his Divine glory, His death of its propitiatory value, and the promised Spirit of His regenerating power.

But it does appear scarcely less preposterous to contend, that the first or the fifteenth generation of readers extracted from the Bible all the instruction which it was designed and is fitted to communicate. Philosophy has to study God's revelation as a whole, both the written and the unwritten. As scientific principles do not lie ready to our hand on the face of nature, neither are they so found on the page of the Bible. And as no desecration is offered to God's works, when they are brought under patient investigation, neither is there any dishonour done to God's word, when it is subjected to similar scientific processes. The written revelation from heaven, doubtless, remains unchanged, and so does the Divine law engraven on the heart, which renders every one amenable to the government of God. But to affirm that man's knowledge of the one or of the other, is like the things themselves unaltered and unalterable, is not only contrary to all analogy, but is also in defiance of

the plainest arguments, and of the most instructive facts of history. To attempt to arrest all progress in the art of life, not the baser but the nobler life, the art of living as we ought, the art of unmasking temptation, of avoiding evil and achieving good,—an art in which the best men are the first to confess their unskilfulness, is to do violence at once to reason and religion. Hence it is inferred that the pursuit of philosophy is not only allowable as a pleasing recreation, and praiseworthy as an elegant employment, but success therein is indispensable to the maturity of individual character and the reformation of our social economy.

President Edwards of America set himself to one part of this work, as is clearly and forcibly stated in his preface to “A Treatise on Religious Affections.” Few will read that book and say, that nothing remains to be done even in the same direction. “It is evident,” he says, “there will come a time of much greater purity in the Church, than has been in ages past. And one great reason of it will be, that at that time, God will give much greater light to his people, to distinguish between true religion and its counterfeits. . . . After religion has revived in the Church of God, and enemies appear, people that are engaged to defend its cause are commonly most exposed where they are least sensible of danger. While they are wholly intent upon the opposition that is openly before them, in order to make head against that, and while they neglect carefully to look around, the devil comes behind them, and gives a fatal

stab unseen ; and he has opportunity to give a more home stroke, and to wound the deeper, because he strikes at his leisure, being obstructed by no resistance or guard. And so it is ever likely to be in the Church, whenever religion revives remarkably, till we have learned well to distinguish between true and false religion, between saving affections and experiences, and those manifold fair shows and glistening appearances, by which they are counterfeited ; the consequence of which, when they are not distinguished, are often inexpressibly dreadful."

We venture to affirm that this work which Edwards undertook, "to distinguish between true and false religion, between saving affections and experiences, and those manifold fair shows and glistening appearances, by which they are counterfeited," has not yet been achieved. Certainly there is no book, which Christians generally regard as having accomplished it. Nor can this work be done, till we have more accurate or scientific knowledge both of our own hearts and of the Word of God.

Let no one grudge philosophy the high function now assigned to her, or think that we are forgetting or disregarding any of the cardinal doctrines of Holy Scripture. We believe that it is only when God shall pour out His Holy Spirit from on high that knowledge shall increase—only when the Spirit shall descend "as water on the thirsty land," shall the Church be united, and "all the ends of the world remember and turn unto God."

But as universities and theological halls, missionary and medical-missionary societies, and their thousand adjuncts, are mere instrumentalities which acquire their efficiency in elevating man *only* from the agency of the Holy Spirit of God, so also is it with philosophy. Nor need it be a matter of surprise if it shall be found, that amid all the armory of this honourable and arduous warfare, moral science and the higher philosophy generally shall obtain a chief place, inasmuch as their maturity will be needed to give to the other weapons that keenness of edge which will secure the victory.

Men are prone to fall into two errors, — the one the reverse of the other. Some in the firm grasp which they take of truth by its practical handle, are disposed to depreciate the importance of its speculative aspect, while others in their eager pursuit of its philosophical side, are inclined to undervalue the worth and deny the clearness of its practical bearings. Man's duty and safety lie chiefly in the honest pursuit of the practical pole of truth, and in unwavering adherence to it at all hazards ; while his honour and privilege and higher advantages consist in the calm and patient investigation of its speculative pole.

He who has charge of a locomotive engine may guide it in safety to its destination, without knowing or desiring to know its cost or the principles of its construction. But if he never reflect upon these things during some of his leisure hours, and make no effort to become acquainted with them, he neglects to cultivate a noble portion of his

humanity, and deprives himself of certain benefits. On the other hand, the engineer who, in his excessive eagerness to study these to him theoretical points, should fail in attention to his immediate and weighty duties, and by disregarding a given signal, for example, should ruin life or property, exposes himself most justly to suitable retribution. Every man may be compared to a locomotive on the railway of life; his will is engineer; his destiny is eternity; his charge is his own true welfare. Some religious men feeling confident that they are moving on exactly according to the rules issued by sovereign authority, not only dismiss from their own minds all philosophical inquiry, but treat even with contempt the investigations of their more inquisitive fellow-men. In doing this, they abjure a precious and fair portion of their nature, and act towards others unreasonably and unkindly, and would doom our race in civil affairs to barbarism, and in religious matters to pupillage. On the other hand, if a philosophical spirit shall so engross himself in speculations, or so overestimate their importance, as to fail to work the locomotive as he knows, or with a little consideration might know, it ought to be wrought, protesting that he cares for nothing till he understands its mechanism, he surely need not be astonished, if he find himself during the journey itself exposed to serious accidents, and the journey perhaps brought to a premature close, and at its termination his person placed under arrest. If it be unwise and injurious in those who are practically and in the main right on religious ques-

tions to discountenance and censure speculative inquiry, it is lamentable to behold ardent and aspiring minds stumbling and falling on the highway of life, by looking too eagerly at the firmament above them.

DIALOGUE VI.

CERTAINTY AND PROBABILITY.

Celsus.—Is not the difference between certainty and probability one, which is frequently resorted to by the advocates of Christianity? Will you be so good as state wherein the distinction consists?

Origen.—The distinction is so obvious and clear, that it scarcely requires any statement.

Celsus.—If the clearness and prominence of the distinction render its verbal announcement unnecessary, as many of your friends seem to think, when they fall back upon it without explaining it, it will be all the more easily stated when a statement is respectfully requested.

Theologus.—It is truly to be regretted that in the best authors we read of moral as distinguished from mathematical certainty, of high and low degrees of certainty, of high probabilities being equal to certainties, and so forth, with few efforts to draw a well-marked line between them. To rest the stress of a weighty argument upon these distinctions, as is very frequently done, while they are left as loose as the sand and shifting as the clouds, is sheer puerillity.

Origen.—Then you are of Mr Gladstone's opinion, that "the association of these two ideas, activity of inquiry, and variety of conclusion, is a fallacious one?"¹

Theologus.—If by "activity of inquiry," you mean *diligent* and *conscientious* inquiry, then it appears to us, that while there will be always variety of conclusion in matters of probability, there will not be contradictory conclusions in matters of certainty.

Origen.—"Our way of ascertaining the tendency of free inquiry is simply to open our eyes and look at the world in which we live; and there we see that free inquiry on mathematical subjects produces unity, and that free inquiry on moral subjects produces discrepancy. Discrepancy there will be among the most diligent and candid, as long as the constitution of the human mind, and the nature of moral evidence, continue unchanged. That we have not freedom and unity together is a very sad thing; and so it is that we have not wings. But we are just as likely to see the one defect removed as the other. It is not only in religion that this discrepancy is found. It is the same with all matters which depend on moral evidence,—with judicial questions, for example, and with political questions. All the judges will work a sum in the rule of three on the same principle, and bring out the same conclusion. But it does not follow that, however honest and laborious they may be, they will all be of one mind on the Douglas case."²

¹ As quoted in *Infidelity*, p. 459.

² Macaulay, quoted in *Infidelity*, pp. 459, 460.

Celsus.—You affirm “that free inquiry on moral subjects produces discrepancy.” Free inquiry then produces discrepancy on every moral question, or only on some questions; if on *every* question, there is no moral certainty at all; if discrepancy arise only on some moral questions, till we know what these questions are as distinguished from others exempt from discrepancy, certainty of any sort is a hopeless expectation. If we must wait for certainty on moral and religious questions, till we shall have been equipped with “wings,” which is very reasonable if it be as “sad” a thing to be without the one as without the other, then we must wait also, and who knows how long, for the privilege of responsibility and for the prospect of social regeneration.

Certainty and
probability dis-
tinguished.

Theologus.—There is, there must be, a distinct line of demarcation between those questions on which discrepancy of opinion is admissible, and those on which it is not admissible among honest and diligent inquirers. We have already seen that *contradiction* is not admissible on any question whatever. *When a proposition is clearly known to be true, our knowledge is certain, and contradiction is excluded. When a proposition is not clearly known to be either true or erroneous, our knowledge is probable, and differences or discrepancies of sentiment (but not contradictions) may be legitimately expected.* There are, consequently, political and judicial and moral questions on which variety of opinion will prevail; for on many points our information is limited and our principles undeveloped.

But who will say that this is the case with all such questions?

Origen.—Then you deny the distinction between moral and mathematical certainty.

Theologus—It seems to me on the first blush of the statement, that what is less than certain, it matters not what business you have in hand, is not certain at all; and to talk of increasing certainty is like carrying water to the sea. But let us hear what the distinction is.

Origen.—“The Christian miracles are

Is religious
knowledge pro-
bable?

of ‘a convincing and stupendous character,’

and yet not so overpowering as the axiom

that a whole is greater than its part. . . . Evidence is obligatory on man, not because it is overpowering or irresistible, but because it preponderates. Indeed, on the former supposition, to talk of obligation were an absurdity.”¹

Celsus.—But how can the knowledge which rests only on preponderating evidence be certain? If on any given matter there be evidence both for and against a particular view, how can I feel assured that I have got possession of the truth? So long as there is a particle of good and valid evidence against a proposition, I cannot with any satisfaction adopt it as true. Do you allow that there is any good and valid evidence opposed to Christianity? If you do, your cause is a feeble one; and if you do not, it is absurd to represent it as resting on *preponderating* evidence.

¹ Infidelity, p. 330.

Theologus.—If moral and mathematical truths are to be compared in regard to the *certainly* which belongs to them, it is improper to take an elementary principle of the one and contrast it with an advanced principle of the other. Man's knowledge that a whole is greater than its part, is not a whit more certain than his knowledge that it is wrong to steal. And as to a knowledge of less patent truths in both of these departments, it can be attained only by a man of sound or honest mind in the diligent use of his faculties. When it is attained we see no room for different certainties. Our knowledge that the Bible is the word of God, is quite as certain, or may become as certain, as our knowledge that when a straight line bisects one of the angles of a triangle, dividing the base into two segments, these segments are proportional to the adjacent sides. It is undoubtedly true to affirm that *if* evidence be irresistible, obligation ceases. But mathematical evidence is not irresistible; it requires competent ability and due attention. If mathematical evidence be styled irresistible to the man of sufficient diligence and power, so may moral evidence. In the moral aspect of any case, to deny a man's power is to exclude his responsibility; to deny his diligence is to affirm his guilt.

Celsus.—It is not every advocate of Christianity that rests its claims upon *preponderating* evidence, or denies the certainty of religious knowledge. Here is another illustration of Christian contradictions. "The investigation," says one, "of the principles of all knowledge, attention to the teaching of nature in the soul and in the

world, discovers these (moral and religious) instincts (which are common to humanity) to be as truthful, and their conviction as certain, as any knowledge that man can possess.”¹

Theologus.—On what, then, does this author rest the certainty of religious knowledge?

Origen.—He rests it upon the validity of the human understanding, and carries it into speculative as well as practical knowledge. Speaking of the system of Spinoza, he remarks, “timid writers, distrusting the faculties which God has given, and which distinguish man from the brutes, will sometimes warn us to turn from such investigations without seeking to ascertain the limits of certainty, lest we see God and man, mind and matter, swallowed up in pantheistic nihilism.”² And again, “Natural theology rests on principles, which are equally competent to establish its truth, and to expose the sophisms of unbelief. . . . God does not deal so hardly with man, his condition is not so pitiable, as that to think much must involve him in error and uncertainty.”³

Celsus.—Much more might be quoted from this author in confirmation of these views; but like many others he does not adhere consistently to his principles. Having admitted only one kind of certainty in human knowledge, he speaks elsewhere as if that certainty had suffered a total shipwreck. For example, he says, “man has in himself no infallible criterion of right and wrong, and can

¹ Christian Theism, vol. i. p. 162.

² *Ib.* p. 176.

³ *Ib.* p. 27.

have none, not even from revelation, because what is infallible in itself, becomes fallible in his interpretation of it.”¹ If we understand this, it means that human certainty is not a genuine but counterfeit certainty, and when we feel certain, we are only certainly deceived. If no human interpretation of the Bible be infallible, or, which is the same thing, true, your certainty is but a broken reed; if every reflection of the glory of your God (to use your own metaphor) from the mirror of his word carries a distorted image to every eye that looks upon it, the mirror must be imperfect, or is the same to you as if it were imperfect.

Theologus.—Certainty, *when legitimately attained*, must be held in all cases to be infallible—otherwise you proclaim a divorce between eternal immutable truth and the human mind. An individual man is fallible, inasmuch as he is responsible,—that is, has the power to use aright, or wantonly abuse, the faculties of his mind. To cast any doubt or uncertainty upon the conclusions of the understanding, when it is properly employed, is one of the snares of scepticism into which it is marvellous to find so many Christians falling.

Origen.—What objection can possibly be taken to the following statement: “We affirm that the kind and amount of evidence offered in support of Christianity suffice to meet the demands of reason, inasmuch as we are involved in many more, and much greater difficulties, by the rejection, than by the admission, of the proof

¹ Christian Theism, vol. ii. p. 80.

tendered to us. And this is the highest kind of moral demonstration that the subject will admit of.”¹

Celsus. — This admission of difficulties, which need to be compared and weighed, so as to have their respective values estimated and a balance struck between them, brings us back to the old ground of *preponderating* evidence, and degrades your religion from the eminence of certainty to the changing sands of probability, where only a few of its modern advocates are contented to leave it. And when you are pleased to add that “this is the highest kind of moral demonstration that the subject will admit of,” the remark is a rebuke to some of your own friends rather than an assault upon us.

Origen. — How are we to get out of this dilemma?

Theologus. — The course of argument pursued in these discussions suggests a way of escape. If the difficulties referred to be *mysteries*,—depths which we cannot fathom, they are not, properly speaking, argumentative difficulties at all. If these difficulties be conflicting statements in the evidence or contradictory principles in reasoning, they must suspend our judgment so far as they extend. *If it be really the case* that such difficulties do attach themselves to the great Christian argument, viewed scientifically, the conclusion must be regarded as *no more than probable*. But then it is not to be allowed to be unlikely, far less impossible, that these difficulties shall be cleared away. On the contrary, it is to be hoped that we shall ere long find our-

Is religious knowledge certain?

¹ Bases, p. 256.

selves in possession, even speculatively, of *a certain knowledge of the Truth*, through humble and unwearied investigation. Meanwhile, so long as these difficulties shall beset our path, and constrain us to admit that our conclusion in favour of Christianity is, philosophically, only probable, we have the *practical certainty* on which to fall back, namely, the indubitable principle universally accepted by mankind in the affairs of life, that in dealing with probabilities it is dutiful and wise to take the safe side, and avoid all needless risk.

Origen.—It does, after all, seem to be extravagant to reduce all our religious and moral knowledge to a pulpy mass of probability. For what can be more obvious than this, that “reasoning proceeds from the known to the unknown — from what is certain to what is problematical?”¹ So that if we had no certainty in religion we could not have a probability either.

Celsus.—It is an equally clear inference from what has been advanced, that if there be no certainty apart from, and independent of, a written revelation, that revelation cannot confer certainty.

Origen.—There is, of course, certainty in many departments of knowledge independently of the Bible; and it is easy to draw the line between matters of probability or opinion and matters of certainty in history and in the sciences both mathematical and physical. For “it is a mistake, and a prejudice, fertile in errors, to imagine that OPINION belongs to one department, and

¹ Bases, p. 6.

CERTAINTY to other departments; as if the honours and immunities of an exemption from the toils of controversy were the class-privilege of this or that aristocratic science.”¹

Celsus.—This is very good, and is a severe castigation of those whose sentiments were formerly noticed, and who seemed to rest satisfied without that certainty in religion and morals which is possessed in other branches of knowledge. You now claim the same, or a similar, certainty in your Christian belief, as is acknowledged to belong to the sciences, even the mathematical. The question which I would now propose for your consideration is this: Does

On what does religious certainty rest? your religious certainty rest solely and entirely on what you call the written revelation?

Origen.—One palpable mark of distinction between heathen and Christian nations surely is to be observed in the fact, that the latter possess what the former are destitute of, religious certainty.

Theologus.—It ought to be remembered that the question is not now regarding the *objective truth* of Christianity and heathenism (certainty is sometimes used in this sense); but the question is, have Christians a *feeling* of certainty in their hearts respecting the truth of their religion which heathens do not experience?

Celsus.—Many Christian writers are loud in their lamentations over the comparative lethargy and lukewarmness of protestants, as contrasted with the self-denial and

¹ Restoration, p. 117, &c.

devotedness of papists and idolaters in their religious services. One of your poets has expressed it thus : “ In Christian hearts, oh ! for a pagan zeal.” Religious zeal and religious certainty have surely some connection with each other.

Origen.—You are forgetting that there is a false zeal, and a false certainty too.

Celsus. — What, then, is the difference between the false certainty and the true ?

Difference between false and true certainty.

Theologus.—The principles brought out in the course of this discussion may, perhaps, answer your question. When a man embraces error in any form whatever, he cannot do so without at the same time doing some violence to the better portion of his nature, —without practising, somehow or other, deception upon himself. He may, of course, work himself up into a certain persuasion that his error is truth ; but this certainty will ever retain infallible indications of its spurious origin. It will ever be of a totally different character and constitution, the man himself being judge, from that simple and genuine assurance which is the result of thorough honesty. The zeal which springs from legitimate certainty will be just and kind, calm and irrepressible. The spurious zeal of a counterfeit certainty will be passionate, fickle, and cruel. The religious assurance of the Christian believer, even in its modesty, is thus easily distinguished from the blustering, intolerant, or malignant zeal of every enthusiast.

Origen.—It will not be denied, however, that at least

in some states of the heathen world, the characteristic feature of society has been that of a painful want of certainty in religion. For example, in the days of Alexander Severus, Emperor of Rome, when Christianity was about to win one of its most important triumphs, "*universal incertitude* was the characteristic of the times ; the gloom of that moral dismay which comes upon cultured minds, when they abandon in despair the long-cherished hope of seizing upon truth and certainty — of *knowing* something beside the theorems of Euclid — of grasping in the hand a stay immoveable. . . . Let any one whose course has not been altogether sensual, or merely busy, but who has known what are called 'exercises of mind,' go back to those moments of his life when convictions, beliefs, persuasions of every kind, were passing from his view, and when nothing remained to him but a dread uncertainty, and the feeling that never again should he grasp a truth. In the recollection of such a season one would not reject the figure as inappropriate, if it were called the night-time of the soul ; and not less so, although all the splendours of literature and science were then glittering around him. It must be so : for the first necessity of man's higher nature is TRUTH, and the despair of finding it is indeed — a darkness that may be felt." ¹

Celsus.—It has been already conceded, that if a man has no knowledge whatever of truth, he can have no responsibility. To speak of the dread uncertainty of

¹ Restoration, pp. 47, 48.

never being able again to grasp a truth, must be either an extravagant statement, or the description of a most morbid feeling. If an individual has some true knowledge, he has some certainty. If a man has no knowledge of truth, and no certainty in himself, till a book is put into his hands, that book can communicate neither certainty nor truth. What use can an unintelligent being make of a book?

Theologus.—The whole perplexity will disappear, if we bear in mind that the Bible comes to us, not only as revealing some truths that are unknown, but also as assuming other truths as known to man. This statement has been strangely overlooked, although it is plainly implied in the very character of a revelation from God to responsible and intelligent beings, and is confirmed by almost every page of the Bible itself. As there is no end to the vagaries of error and the follies of mankind, it is a very possible thing for persons to work themselves up into any conceivable state of madness or despondency. We would not, therefore, for a moment question the accuracy of the alleged fact, that some individuals, more or less, may be found, whose real condition, or fancied condition, is one that cannot be otherwise described than that of total doubt or blank despair. As to the few who may be in such a state, it will not be denied that such a state is the result of personal or hereditary guilt, and that its horrible darkness will not be long protracted, provided an individual deal honestly with himself.

Origen.—But do you mean to affirm that we can attain any sort of religious certainty without the aid of the Bible and Christianity?
Is there any certainty apart from the Bible?

Theologus.—To assert that any one could attain a certain knowledge of God's mercy in Christ, and the way of salvation, except through Divine revelation, were indeed fool-hardy; for this is one of the great truths, if not the greatest, specially revealed. But do you deny or doubt, that every man may, and that many men do, attain a certain knowledge of their guilt and wretchedness without any Biblical assistance? Can it be questioned that the word of God, over and over again, asserts or assumes the validity of the divine law written on the human heart? The validity of this law, not only in man's pristine condition, but even now and in the densest darkness of heathenism, as available to guide a man's footsteps so far, and to condemn him if not obeyed, is plainly implied in many passages of the Bible. From the very nature of the case it must be so.

Origen.—But the great mass of men who are ignorant of Christianity have not this certain knowledge of their guilt and misery.

Theologus.—You cannot, however, infer from this, that therefore they have not the means of attaining it. They may have the means without employing them; just as a great number of those who may be said to know Christianity are equally destitute

of this certain knowledge of their wretchedness and sin.

Origen.—On what, then, does the certainty of our knowledge rest?

Theologus.—It can rest on nothing else
Grounds of certainty. than the immutability of Truth, and the validity of the human understanding. Truth itself is eternal and unchangeable. When any truth is found by the mind while honestly and diligently seeking for it, the mind is conscious of having found the truth. The clear and satisfactory consciousness of having found truth is the only possible, and an amply sufficient, basis of certainty.

Celsus.—So you agree with us, that “the basis of certitude lies in the essential characteristics of the intuitions themselves—in their distinctness, in their uniformity, and, under due influences, in their universality; not in their symbolical representation upon the sacred page.”

Origen.—And you take part with the enemies of the gospel in removing the basis of religious certitude “from the Bible page to the religious consciousness of humanity.” By your decision “the test is shifted from the inspired Book—the law and the testimony—to a comparison of inward experiences.”¹

Theologus.—Your conclusions are rather too hasty, my friends. Truth, as formerly explained, presupposes in every instance an object known as well as a subject

¹ Infidelity, pp. 211, 212.

knowing, being the agreement of the thought within us with the object about which we think. A clear consciousness, then, that we know any object which is external to ourselves, implies that by some means or other we have got beyond ourselves, and come into intercourse or contact with that object, so as to know it. Hence, therefore, the basis of certitude does not lie in the essential characteristics of *purely subjective* intuitions. Knowledge, or what is worthy of the name of knowledge, never is, and cannot be, purely subjective. Knowledge is the act of the knowing agent going forth upon, seizing, and holding the object known; it is a transition from the subjective to the objective. Normal or true knowledge consists in making this transition in a due and proper manner. And certainty consists in the consciousness that we have done so.

Now, this representation of the case does not remove the basis of religious certitude from the Bible page to human consciousness. But this language conveys altogether an inaccurate conception of the matter. For suppose a truth which we know independently of the Bible entirely, such as the fact that guilt prevails in human society, and that we ourselves have been offenders over and over again, our certainty as to this truth lies plainly in the distinct and unhesitating consciousness that our understanding has gone beyond its own immediate precincts, by some medium or other, and grasped events in the external world. In this case it is altogether irrelevant to talk of our certainty

being "removed from the Bible page to human consciousness."

Some one may now say, oh! but I know that man is a sinner, just because the Bible says so. Very well. But remember, that whoever says there is no other means of knowing that men are guilty, but the statements of the Bible, contradicts the Bible itself. And even if you believe in the depravity of man simply and soely because the Bible inculcates this doctrine, it is incorrect to say that the ground of your certainty is not human consciousness, but the page of the Bible. The real basis of your certitude in this instance, is unquestionably *your own consciousness* that such is the teaching of the Bible.

Lastly, as to those all-important truths which man has no means of knowing but through the page of inspiration, such as justification by faith, and sanctification through the Holy Spirit, to set the page of the Bible against human consciousness in discussing the ground of our certain knowledge and belief of these saving doctrines, is sheer folly. The foundation of our assurance as to these precious truths is, and can be, nothing else but our vivid and unembarrassed consciousness that the Bible is indeed the word of God, and that these glorious and blessed doctrines are revealed therein. In stating these views, we appeal to those who feel "that it is not a greater happiness to inherit a good religion, than it is a fault to have it only by inheritance; that it is the greatest of follies to neglect any diligence that may pre-

vent the being mistaken where it is the greatest of miseries to be deceived ; and that how dear soever things taken upon the score are sold, there is nothing worse taken up upon trust than religion, in which he deserves not to meet with the true one that cares not to examine whether or no it be so."

DIALOGUE VII.

THE STANDARD OF MORALITY.

Origen.—"In none of the classic schools do we find a moral doctrine at once adequate and consistent. This is only to be found in the revelation of Jesus Christ."¹

Celsus.—In order to feel yourself competent to pronounce this decision, you must be in possession of some standard of morality. Being in possession of that standard, you test by means of it, first, the moral doctrine of the classic schools, and next the moral doctrine of the New Testament, and then pronounce your verdict, that the first comes short of the standard, and that the second comes up to it. Just as a merchant cannot determine the respective lengths of two pieces of silk, till he apply to both the standard measure.

Origen.—Well, of course, we have a standard, if such you choose to call it, namely, conscience; to which we appeal in proof of the existence and character of God. "It is not merely to the fact of a divine power that conscience testifies, but eminently to the character of that power. The moral law, which it reveals, is not simply

¹ Theism, pp. 351, 352.

the expression of a supreme Will, but of a Will which is essentially good and righteous.”¹

Celsus.—In these remarks you base Theism upon the moral law given by conscience; and elsewhere it is asserted, “that morality only finds a valid basis in a theistic doctrine.”² I humbly submit, that some explanation is here required. Religion and morality may be allowed in their practical working mutually to support each other; but ultimately you must rest the one upon the other, or give to both an independent foundation. So also, when you affirm that there is “in the teaching and character of Christ a rare exhibition of wisdom and goodness,” that “He taught a pure and exalted morality,” and remind “those who repudiate the Divine authority of Christianity,” that they do not deny these assertions,³ is it not plain that you appeal to some criterion in morality, independent of the Christian Scriptures, whose authority is acknowledged in common by you and by us? What is that criterion?

Theologus.—The question is perfectly legitimate and fair. And it is one of the weakest points in the Christian apologetics, that this question is not only not satisfactorily answered, but not even calmly and courteously entertained.

Is conscience the criterion? *Origen.*—Is not conscience the criterion?

“All the authority of this faculty is on the side of righteousness and truth; it has sanctions for the enforcement of its utterances; it approves the good, and denounces the evil.”⁴ Have we not a standard “in the

¹ Theism, p. 274. ² Ib. p. 373. ³ Ib. 350. ⁴ Infidelity, p. 33.

supremacy of conscience, enthroned, as it were, above the whole (of our faculties), and ever uttering her voice on the side of whatsoever things are true, and lovely, and of good report, and against their opposites; and not only so, but rewarding well-doing, and punishing wrong-doing?"¹

Celsus.—In every such appeal as this which is made to Conscience, you are doing the very thing which you blame us for doing. You affirm that something subjective, something within us, it matters not whether it be called reason or conscience, "is to be umpire in every dispute;" that "there are laws of the mind, which are exact and uniform, and which are absolute tests to man, and by means of them the pretensions of every doctrine must be decided."² If conscience really be what you have now claimed it to be, then why sneer at us for maintaining, "that each man possesses in his own mind the power of discerning the absolute truth, so that everything supposed to be included in religion is to be tested by this intuitive susceptibility or power?"³ You tell us that we exchange "an infallible Bible for an infallible Self."⁴ In your description of conscience you make it infallible; for otherwise you could never reach an infallible Bible. When you have reached an infallible platform, to deny the assistance, or destroy the ladder, by which you ascended, is not the best way to persuade others to join you.

Origen.— "Two things are here confounded: the

¹ Infidelity, p. 34. ² *Ib.* p. 166. ³ *Ib.* p. 169. ⁴ *Ib.* p. 170.

capacity for receiving religious truth, and the capacity of unaided reason to discover it.”¹

Celsus.—You have claimed for conscience, as is constantly done by others, a great deal more than a simple capacity for receiving religious truth. It will do no good to confound what you have now distinguished. But if you deny to man independently of the Bible, all moral and religious knowledge, and assert that he has only a capacity to receive it when the Bible comes before him, then, how with any consistency can you speak of “the clear imperishable utterances of our moral nature,”² and express your willingness “to abide by a fair trial of the contents of the revelation itself;”² inasmuch as the “nature of the doctrine must be taken into account, as well as the external evidence which attests it?”²

Theologus.—The key to the whole is found in the following statement, which I am afraid has not received due attention from either party. “It is not enough for our author to say, as all sensible men have ever said, that our knowledge of ‘the *true*, the *beautiful*, and the *good*,’ comes to us in part from our intuitions; he is peremptory in asserting that it comes to us *only* from that source—a doctrine which can never be made to harmonize with anything deserving the name of philosophy; and which must prove eminently hostile to the purity of religion.”³ This is the gist of the whole controversy. Christians are constantly affirming we have no moral or religious know-

¹ Infidelity, p. 173.

² *Ib.* p. 178.

³ Quotation in Infidelity, pp. 201, 202.

ledge without the Bible; and infidels are perpetually crying, the Bible can give us no additional knowledge to what we have without it. Both statements, we apprehend, are wrong.

Is there religious
knowledge apart
from Revelation?

Origen.—It is affirmed that mankind have no moral and religious knowledge except what they derive from the Bible, and that for two substantial reasons. First, In point of fact nobody can tell us what that knowledge is; and secondly, the supposition of its possession is unnecessary in conducting the Christian argument. If men possessed religious knowledge and a moral law independently of the Bible, these might be allowed to form a criterion, if we only knew what they were. “Are not the vast majority of men at this moment—have they not been in all ages—bowing down to stocks and stones; worshipping all sorts of false deities, and honouring them with rites well worthy of them? Has there not been among vast communities for unknown ages, the easiest reception of the most hideous superstition, the most unshrinking, unquestioning perpetration of the most horrible cruelties and pollutions in obedience to even the falsest pretensions of priestcraft? Is it not the rarest thing to find men evincing any capacity for criticising the religious and moral systems by which their faculties have been swathed and bound from infancy? It is plain they *do* not.”¹

Celsus.—The facts are admitted as you describe them. They are, however, of no avail in the argument, unless

¹ A Defence of the Eclipse of Faith, p. 104.

you infer from them, as your author does, that the heathen could not do any better than they did, and consequently are not guilty and worthy of condemnation, but are simply objects of commiseration and pity. Now your Bible affirms that they are guilty; and I am surely right in inferring that they could have done, and ought to have done better. Moreover, the author referred to is constrained to admit that men have, or may have, some knowledge independently of divine revelation, when he says that we are allowed "*partially* to judge of God's character, rights, and jurisdiction."¹

Origen.—Well, then, do tell us what your standard is; set before us "the fixed basis of morality," "the common conscience and heart morality." "Is it an absolutely invariable standard, or a variable one that is spoken of? or is it a measure of India rubber that will hold three bushels or one? *Whose* 'fixed moral basis?' That of the New Zealander, or of a Hottentot, or of an ancient Greek, a Roman, a Jew, or of a Hindoo, or of a Chinese, or of an Englishman? For all these have had very discordant notions on many points of morals, and *therefore* (as well as for other reasons) about God. Or is every body in general meant, and nobody in particular?"²

Celsus.—Your argument has two edges. The Bible is, of course, your criterion or basis. But the Bible is nothing to anybody except as it is understood or interpreted. Now, pray, *whose* interpretation of the Bible is your fixed moral and spiritual basis? Which doctor is

¹ A Defence, &c., p. 48.

² Ib. p. 105.

your authority? Whose doctrine is your standard—that of Arius or Luther; that of John Knox or John Wesley; that of Canterbury or the Vatican; that of Calvin or Arminius; that of the Quakers or Moravians; that of Sandemanians, or Hutchinsonians, or Swedenborgians, or Muggletonians, or Fifth-monarchy men?

Theologus.—The mere fact that a moral and religious standard is not known, or not recognised, or not obeyed, whether among heathens or Christians, cannot be admitted as evidence that there is in reality no such standard at all, or that it cannot be found by a diligent and honest search.

Origen.—But the existence of a moral standard, independently of the Bible, is quite irrelevant to the Christian argument. For “the first principle of *morals* is the implicit submission of a creature to the Creator, absolute surrender of the finite to the Infinite, whose declared will is of itself all-sufficient authority.”¹ “The authority of God is of itself, even if no reasons were given, and none were imaginable but his will, the sufficient and all-sufficient authority.”²

Celsus.—Your principle, then, is this, that actions are right, simply because God wills them; and you reject the other principle, that God wills them because they are right. On this supposition, our argument would clearly be at an end, provided you adhered to your own assumption. But this you cannot do. If actions are right, simply because God wills them, then God cannot

¹ A Defence, &c. p. 107.

² *Ib.* p. 111.

manifest his righteousness to his intelligent creatures. But you say that “the Bible theory does *not* shut the door against the possibility of God’s proving himself a moral Governor; on the contrary, assures us that he He will prove himself an exact one.”¹ And in the very next page of the same book an appeal is made to “the general convictions of men in all ages,” and to certain “moral intuitions,” to shew that such a being as some persons call God “is not the God of human consciousness.”

Origen.—We admit, of course, the receptivity of the human mind; its power to acquire know-
 Man’s capacities. ledge. “I see that men have moral *capacities*; but I see also with my own eyes, and other men see it too, that those capacities, as they are variously developed, lead to the most various and erroneous ‘moral judgments,’ and consequently also to the most various and erroneous conceptions of the Deity. They are in every man, as is the instrument that has developed them, varying between the wide limits of a ‘Hottentot and a St Paul.’ ”²

Celsus.—Our moral capacities “are in every man, as is the instrument that has developed them!!” If nothing be due *to our use or abuse* of the instrument, and of our capacities too, you should have said so distinctly; and we could have recognised at once in your statement the logic of Spinoza or of the Koran. Nay, more, if in any case the instrument be a bad one, who is the author of

¹ A Defence of the Eclipse of Faith, pp. 60, 61.

² *Ib.* p. 112.

it? If you say God is its author, you make him the originator of evil. If you affirm that man is its author, you attribute to him something more than mere capacity.

Origen.—"The concession of the *principle*, that from *without* there may come a light which may develope into act the latent moral and spiritual capacities of our nature, is sufficient for the overthrow of the dogma, 'that an authoritative external revelation of moral and spiritual truth is essentially impossible to man.'"¹

Celsus.—It is granted that man's capacities or powers are developed only by coming into contact with *objects external* to himself. What we maintain is this, that if our moral and spiritual capabilities are not developed *at all* till the Bible developes them, then are we not responsible beings till this development takes place. And we further maintain, that whatever external object is the *first* instrument to develop our moral capacities, it cannot, in so far as it is the instrument of development, be invested with *authority*; for the very conception of authority, and the rightfulness of submission thereto, implies some development of our spiritual faculties.

Origen.—Notwithstanding all that can be said, it is plain, that "amidst the variety of human judgments, a *fixed basis of morality* may easily be shewn to be a quicksand, without any personal God."²

Celsus.—You are surely not ignorant of the fact, that many cannot find a personal God except on the basis of

¹ A Defence, &c. p. 93.

² Ib. pp. 63, 64.

man's moral nature. Nor is there any escape from this inference, that if man without the Bible be entirely without light, he "is inwardly so dark that he cannot possibly have any religion but what he receives blindly."

Origen.—Then you believe that there are "definite *a priori* notions, which everywhere enable man at once to pronounce on the truth or falsehood of whatever professes to be an external revelation."¹

Bible assumes
some truths and
reveals others.

Theologus. — Some indeed have contended for such a position ; but it seems to be loosely worded, and is somewhat extravagant. The conclusion to which we are now led by the discussion is this ; the necessities of the Christian argument constrain us to admit, that there is in mankind, independently of written revelation, some knowledge of religion and morality, which implies something like a standard or criterion ; and that the difficulty of pointing to that standard does not prove its non-existence, or the impossibility of finding it. We have been led to perceive also, that the Bible is intended to reveal to man something additional to what he knew before, and very precious in itself ; and the very possibility of such a revelation implies, as the terms in which the revelation itself is couched show, that those to whom it is made not only have moral capacities, but also have these capacities to some extent developed, as intelligent beings, in the exercise of their responsibility.

Celsus.—I have just found a passage in the work of a

¹ A Defence, &c., p. 94.

Christian advocate, which if I could not show you the page where it is printed, you would have asserted, I am sure, to be from the pen of an opponent of Christianity. "If men's religious sensibilities were already awake—if the spiritual life had already been begotten in them—if their souls were on the point of detaching themselves from the low and the trivial interests of the hour, and were on the earnest look-out for objects to gratify their higher instincts, and to nourish their diviner capabilities—this material universe would, no doubt, exhibit a fullness and a force of symbolic significance adequate not only for instructional, but for emotional improvement and elevation. We make no question that there have been occasional instances, and that there are still, although rare indeed, in which the Father of Spirits has looked in upon the human soul through the medium of Nature, and has won from it an inarticulate response which, rightly interpreted, would be, 'Let me come to thine arms—let me rest on thy bosom—let me lose my littleness in thy greatness, and merge my will in thine.'"¹

Theologus. — It is necessary to maintain on the one hand the integrity of man's responsibility under all circumstances, and, on the other, the peculiar preciousness of God's revealed mercy. While, therefore, it is held *objectively*, that not one of the sinful children of men can be pardoned and accepted of God except on the ground of Christ's atoning death, it must also be maintained *sub-*

¹ Bases of Belief, pp. 102, 103.

jectively, in the first place, to preserve man's responsibility, that men destitute of a knowledge of the gospel, may and ought to "seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him and find Him" (Acts, xvii. 27), because "God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him" (Acts, x. 34, 35). And in the second place, to vindicate the glory of the gospel, it must be contended, that no man can *find* God except through believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, — that no one can become acquainted with the method of reconciliation between guilty man and his righteous Sovereign, and be filled "with all joy and peace in believing," except through the knowledge of "the glorious gospel of the blessed God," which is a matter of pure revelation.

Celsus.—These views are materially different from what some have told us of Christianity; which is represented as "an expedient, not to *impart* new religious ideas, but to *vivify* pre-existent ones—not so much to convey something beyond reach to the intellect, as to stimulate dormant affections and subjugate the will."¹ "We have already said enough to show that mankind needed not so much a directive as a suasive revelation of God's will. It is a special characteristic of the manifestation of God in Christ, as given us in the New Testament, that its leading design is, not so much to instruct our race in duties, as to supply a motive for their performance."²

Origen — These statements are very loose and un-

¹ Bases of Belief, p. 74.

² *Ib.* p. 127.

warranted; and few, if any, among Evangelical Christians have any sympathy with them. "The eternal life, which is offered to me in the Gospel—the Gospel being interpreted as it is in my creed, and therefore not to be thought of as if it were a superfluous announcement of known moralities, but as a revelation of Truths quite unattainable by reason—is of universal aptitude, in relation to human nature in its actual condition; and it must be so thought of even although in fact it were but one in millions that should accept it." ¹

Celsus.—You now contend, then, for these three positions. First, that in the Bible there is a manifestation or discovery of new and otherwise unobtainable truths. Secondly, that there is an aptitude or fitness between this revelation and the moral nature of man. And thirdly, that though millions should not acknowledge or act upon this agreement and aptitude, you would still maintain that it exists. In the last point you have conceded a great principle, that we cannot judge of what man *can do*, or *should do*, by what he *has done*. Do you still adhere to the second point, and to this plain inference which it sustains, that if there be a fitness or aptitude in what you affirm to be a divine revelation in relation to man's nature, there must be in the actual or possible possession of man, even while destitute of that revelation, some standard of morality and some religious knowledge?

Origen.—The inference is legitimate. "Christ, as the reformer of the human system in its secular aspect, takes

¹ Restoration of Belief, p. 325.

up and authenticates those well understood principles which as soon as they are heard approve themselves to the consciences of men, and which the sages of all times have recognised and taught. That the teaching of an ethical reformer should be consentaneous with the better feelings and convictions of men, as embodied in the sayings and teachings of minds of the highest order, is what we should look for as the FIRST requirement in one who comes forward to regenerate a world that has fallen into disorder."

Pliny. *Celsus.*—Was Pliny, the younger, then, innocent or guilty in persecuting the early Christians? Did he know, or might he have known, that he was doing wrong?

Origen.—"This enlightened Roman gentleman, well conversant as he was with whatever had been said and taught by the philosophers of Greece or Rome, was conscious of no humiliation, he did not blush when these stupid symbols had been poised near him, and he, prompting the form of appellation—*præeunte me*—pointed to them as fit objects of devout regard."² "The severities to which Pliny had allowed himself to have recourse were prompted entirely by his own sense of public duty."³

Celsus.—If Pliny could go to such lengths in cruelty and degrading idol-worship, "conscious of no humiliation," while yet he was fully acquainted with "those well-understood principles which approve themselves to the consciences of men," those "better feelings and convic-

¹ Restoration of Belief, p. 269.

² *Ib.* p. 70.

³ *Ib.* p. 75.

tions, embodied in the sayings and teachings of minds of the highest order," and notwithstanding this be reckoned "an enlightened Roman gentleman," "prompted entirely by his own sense of duty,"—where shall we look for those "sophistically constituted, or sophisticated and debauched minds, that do succeed in reasoning themselves out of their instinctive beliefs;—men who, with a suicidal wantonness, having applied logical scissors to the nerves of the moral life, do, and may, with truth declare that they are conscious of no impulse leading them to look to the supreme power or mercy?"¹

Theologus.—Do you, then, admit, or do you not, that there is amongst mankind some standard of morality independently of written revelation? Is it too much to ask you to be consistent with yourself either in its admission or rejection?

Origen.—We, of course, appeal to such a standard in maintaining the internal evidences of the Bible. Take, for example, the First Epistle general of Peter. "The calm majesty, the fervour, the bright hopefulness, and the intense moral import of the Epistle carry it home to every ingenuous mind as an embodiment of whatever is the most affecting in theology, and the most effective and salutary in ethics. With those—if there are any, who have no consciousness of these qualities in the writing before us, I should not court controversy. In any such instance nature must have dealt in a very parsimonious manner with the mind and heart, and sophistry must

¹ Restoration, p. 274.

have greatly overdone her part.”¹ “This Epistle, if judged of *purely on the ground of its intrinsic merits*, carries home to our understandings and best feelings an irresistible impression of the goodness, wisdom, and simplicity of the writer. Search the entire compass of ethical writings, ancient and modern, we should not find even one that carries more decisively upon it the characteristics of sincerity and truthfulness.”² Similar remarks apply more or less to every page of the Bible.

Celsus.—Here then you appeal to heathens and infidels to judge of “the intrinsic merits” of the Bible, and even decline to have any controversy with those who are so degraded by vice or so deficient by nature, as to be unable to perceive and appreciate its moral and spiritual excellences, which of course they cannot do without obtaining a conception of these excellences from some other source. Elsewhere you say as to the heathen, that in the course of the arduous martyr struggle of the early Christians, “a New Principle came to be recognised and a New Feeling came to govern the minds of men; which principle and feeling conferred upon the individual man, however low his rank, socially or intellectually, a dignity, unknown to classical antiquity; and which yet must be the basis of every moral advancement we can desire, or think of as possible.”³ If, then, there be a principle and feeling which “must be the *basis* of every moral advancement,” and which confer a dignity unknown to the most refined and cultured heathens, because they

¹ Restoration of Belief, p. 186.

² *Ib.* p. 191.

³ *Ib.* p. 106.

can be produced by Christianity alone,—“ which neither Pliny nor any man of his time had thought of, or could have been made to comprehend,”¹ how can you ask such men to sit in judgment upon the intrinsic merits and moral excellences of the Bible?

As to unbelievers in Christianity, or those who decline to admit its claims when pressed upon them, you smile at their complaint of suffering a sort of martyrdom for their opinions, or their convictions, as they would call them, and you remark :—“ A claim, in behalf of the gospel, must be made of what is its own, and which these writers, without leave asked, have appropriated. As to

every word and phrase upon which the
Is there truth or conscience in man without the Bible? significance of this their profession (of suffering for the truth) turns, it must be given

up, leaving them in possession of so much only of the meaning of such phrases as would have been intelligible to PLUTARCH, to PORPHERY, and to M. AURELIUS. A surrender must be made of the words CONSCIENCE, and TRUTH, and RIGHTEOUSNESS, and SIN; and, alas! modern unbelievers must be challenged to give me back that ONE awe-fraught NAME which they (must I not plainly say so?) have stolen out of the Book: when they have frankly made this large surrender, we may return to them the *Tò Θεῖον* of classical antiquity. Yet this plagiarism, as to terms, is the smaller part of that invasion of rights with which the same persons are chargeable.
 When those who, after rejecting Christianity,

¹ Restoration of Belief, p. 73.

talk of suffering for the ‘truth of God,’ and speak as if they were conscience-bound ‘toward God,’ they must know that they not only borrow a language which they are not entitled to avail themselves of, but that they invade a ground of religious belief whereon they can establish for themselves no right of standing.”¹ But let me ask you in all candour how, after we have made “this large surrender,” and confessed that we have borrowed, or rather “stolen,” from the Bible, not only the terms, but the meaning of the terms, “Conscience, and truth, and righteousness, and sin,” and after penitently acknowledging our worst plagiarism of all in respect to the name of God himself, how can we be considered capable of sitting in judgment, as you ask us to do, upon “the calm majesty, the fervour, the bright hopefulness, and the intense moral import” of a portion of the Bible, and to acquiesce in your decision that it is “an embodiment of whatever is the most affecting in theology, and the most effective and salutary in ethics?” I can understand you when you say that you should not court controversy with those who have no consciousness of those qualities. But for that very reason I do not see that there can be any controversy at all, if a consciousness of those qualities is only to be had through the Book itself. You blast the very rock on which you build.

Origen.—“Christianity must be looked at in its own light.”²

Celsus.—Very good. But what I have said is this,

¹ Restoration, pp. 92, 93, 94.

² *Ib.* p. 235.

that if Christianity be the *only* moral and religious light in the world, controversy between us is vain; and the very arguments which you use, and on which you rest the greatest weight, are absurd. “You assume the truth of Christianity, in order that you may shew it to be true.”¹

Origen.—“I admit that it is so, in great measure, and it must be so in the nature of things. So long as your mood of mind is this, that you will grant nothing which it is possible for you to deny, you will catch only a glimpse of things, disadvantageously presented to the eye. But if you allow me to exhibit the same objects in their true position, and in their natural proportions, you will yourself see them to be real. After this you will not ask me to follow you from point to point in so rigid a manner. If I undertook to teach you the modern astronomy, and you would at once grant that my interpretation of the visible heavens is the true one, I should be able to convince you that it is so in much less time, and by a far less painful process, than as if you make it a point of honour to dispute every inch of ground.”¹

Celsus.—It appears, then, that you yourself admit the substantial accuracy of my position, namely, that you have been begging the question at issue. And you now assert that in assuming the truth of Christianity in order to prove that it is true, you are yielding to necessity; “it must be so, in the nature of things.” The assumption of such a necessity is scepticism in its subtlest and most

¹ Restoration, p. 236.

malignant form. I am no such sceptic as *that*. Unbeliever in Christianity though I be, I profess this *belief*, namely, that *if* Christianity be true, it is possible so to represent it to the human mind as to be free from inconsistencies and contradictions in itself, and in its proofs or evidences unbetrayed by vicious argumentation.

As to the parallel which you draw between Christianity and the modern astronomy, I grant that in a loose and popular sense your remark is correct enough. But why not do in Christianity what has been done in astronomy, and make good your ground "from point to point in the most rigid manner?" Why not do so, especially when there are individuals who *do* "make it a point of honour to dispute every inch of ground?" Even though the process be tedious and painful, let us have it, that truth may not suffer but be fully vindicated. To take refuge in the bare assertion, that this achievement cannot be effected, looks like a pusillanimous betrayal of the truth, or a clumsy effort to conceal your own incompetency.

Theologus.—Why should not Christians honestly acknowledge that the scientific argument for Christianity in its present state of development is incomplete? And resting the strength of their cause, in the meantime, on its practical defences, they might set themselves to a vigorous prosecution of the truth in its scientific aspect.

Origen.—Well, supposing that we have not yet reached the goal, it may be asked, how far are we on the way, and is it possible to compute the distance between us and the goal?

Theologus.—One of the first things to be done is evidently to determine the moral criterion in some form or other. Even the practical argument demands the establishment, of course in a practical shape, of the moral standard.

The practical criterion.

Origen.—How would you state the criterion in morals for practical purposes?

Theologus.—It might perhaps be stated thus: Every responsible being such as man has true knowledge of his moral and religious obligations to some extent, more or less; and the man who does not act up to the knowledge which he has is guilty. As to the first point in this statement, it will not, we think, be disputed. “For neither do the spirits damned lose all their virtue;” that is, they do not cease to be ethical or responsible beings, and as such they must have some moral intelligence and conscience left to them. How much more the children of men in their present state of probation! As to the second point, his present amount of knowledge is made the guide in moral questions to every individual man. Conscience, so commonly pleaded, cannot be considered the standard in morality, generally or scientifically, because it is corrupted and one man’s professed conscience contradicts another. But his own conscience, honestly followed, is to every man a practical guide, inasmuch as it is always near him, and is *not wholly* blinded; and he who follows the light which he has, is in the way of obtaining more.

Origen.—How do you apply this principle in defence of Christianity?

Theologus.—Simply thus: There is more than *prima facie* evidence to show that Christianity is entitled to a fair hearing. When Christianity obtains from any man a fair hearing, there is a congruity or harmony between it and the dictates of his conscience, which brings him under an obligation to believe and obey.

Origen.—If any one disputes this position what would you say to him?

Theologus.—This is my ultimatum or stand-point, and I cannot *reason* with the man who disputes it. If any one affirms that he has carefully and conscientiously examined Christianity, and has found in it no beauty to attract his affections, no truth to arrest his soul, no authority to subdue his will, with such an one I can enter into no controversy.

Celsus.—Ah well, that makes short work of it. As to the scientific view of the question, have you anything to advance?

Theologus.—In this case the difficulties, as we have seen, are numerous and formidable. Nor do I feel that I as an individual, or as occupying my present position, am under any special obligation to answer this question.

Celsus.—Has anything been done towards a solution of this question, or is anything likely to be accomplished?

Origen.—Much has been attempted at least. Here is a definition of sin to begin with. “The line must be drawn in theory, as we may be sure it will in the Divine Judgment, between the natural disorder of human nature, and the wilful sins of the

What is sin?

individual; but there can be nothing objectionable, if we consider the perfection of the Divine Nature and Agency, in defining sin to be, whatever, in the nature or agency of intelligent beings, is in opposition to the Divine Will, or in discord with the harmony of His works, whether in any particular instance it be voluntary or involuntary.”¹

Celsus.—Passing the objection that this seems to resolve the distinction between vice and virtue into a Divine volition, I am at a loss to perceive how sin or guilt can in any case be involuntary. To say that some sins are voluntary and some involuntary is “most admired confusion.” The guilt that is involuntary in the creature, must be ascribed to God himself, or to some Manichean eternal principle of evil.

Origen.—Ah, you don’t understand me. “Every one knows that prolonged habits of vice destroy the power of the will, and enslave reason to passion; yet none would refuse to call an action sinful, because committed by a man who has become the slave of sin.”²

Celsus.—Of course such an action is guilty; but who would call it *involuntary*, when it is plainly the result of the former acts of the will, even supposing that the man was the most fettered slave when he committed it?

Theologus.—There is obviously a distinction between what is voluntary *directly* and voluntary *indirectly*, which will clear up the present question. Many sins can only be regarded as *indirectly* voluntary; to call them involuntary seems altogether inadmissible.

¹ Christian Theism, vol. ii. p. 249.

² *Ib.* p. 250.

Origen. — “ Evil is, at the most, a deprivation of good.”¹

Celsus. — Does this mean that *all* sin is involuntary? Please to explain yourself.

Origen. — “ If, notwithstanding the Perfections of the Creator, sinfulness and imperfection be inseparable from the creature, it cannot give a higher view of the Divine Character, to regard sinfulness and imperfection as original in every man, than as transmitted from generation to generation.”² “ It is not improbable that the dealings of God with the race of mankind are, in some way, dependent upon the original weakness and frailty of human nature.”³ “ Evil abounds in finite beings.”⁴

Celsus. — If I understand your language, you identify the necessary imperfection of the finite creature with evil and guilt. This interpretation of your words is the only one which will bear the inference which you draw, and which, you say, is confirmed by revelation, namely, “ that every man will be accountable for his own works, and will not be responsible for any hereditary taint of evil.”⁵ Is this indeed the doctrine held by the Protestant Churches? Leaving them and you to settle that question, I go on to observe that you do not adhere consistently to your own opinion. At one turn of the controversy you hold this opinion; at another turn you espouse an opinion exactly the reverse. For example, you say, “ morally, a creature must surely be considered

¹ Christian Theism, vol. ii. p. 141. ² *Ib.* p. 251. ³ *Ib.*, p. 358.

⁴ *Ib.* p. 366.

⁵ *Ib.*, p. 251.

perfect, when it is in exact adjustment to universal nature, in all the relations of the position in which God has placed it ; when its faculties, to the extent of their power, combine in harmonious action in themselves and with the world which environs it ; and all its agency is directed, within its sphere, to fulfil the Will of God. Such moral perfection is certainly conceivable, and, reason naturally conjectures, is the actual condition of all the creatures as they proceed from the hands of the Creator.”¹ And still more explicitly do you contradict yourself when you remark, “ The difference between the Scriptural doctrine of the fall, and the opinion that man was originally imperfect, may seem, at first sight, to be one of little importance. But it touches the foundation of the whole system of revelation, and extends to the question of Christianity or infidelity.”²

Theologus.—The result of this discussion seems to be, that in order to establish the evidences of Christianity on a *scientific* basis, it is necessary to settle the preliminary question, what is the ethical criterion, or in other words, what is the difference between virtue and vice, or between sin and holiness. Though this question be encompassed with serious difficulties—though the road thus indicated as the one in which we must travel be rugged and steep, yet inasmuch as it is the only legitimate one to our destination, we should nerve our minds and gird up our loins to perform the journey.

¹ Christian Theism, vol. ii. p. 248.

² *Ib.* p. 256.

Origen.—Can you tell us, then, what is the criterion in morals?

Theologus.—We do not by any means profess to solve the problem. But there must be some considerations, not far to seek, which will afford some material aid in any attempt to reach a solution.

Origen.—What are these considerations?

Theologus.—At your request I have no objections to state briefly some thoughts upon this topic, which I may take another opportunity of unfolding and illustrating.

There is, however, another question which takes precedence of that respecting the ethical criterion, and which forms the first and great topic in philosophy. The solution of this question is the great desideratum of modern speculation, as it may be shewn to be common to all the sciences. Scientific or strictly logical evidence on *any* subject must have for its foundation a definition of terms and a statement of first principles. Without an exact apprehension of what is assumed, as well as a correct conception of what is to be proved, it is impossible to produce evidence that shall be satisfactory to a reflecting mind. Looking at matters in this light, it is observed that all human knowledge divides itself into two branches: Assumptions and Inferences,—truths which are taken for granted, and truths which are not assumed but proved. Aristotle stated this distinction with great precision, and it has been universally acknowledged. The problem, therefore, may be pro-

Man's fundamen-
tal beliefs.

posed to draw a line between these two sorts of truths, which have been designated noetic and dianoetic, by embodying the former in verbal statements. To express simply and orderly whatever is taken for granted in the various departments of human learning, seems to be the very first duty of philosophy. The want of such a statement must multiply and aggravate disputes, and frequently retard the progress of knowledge. There are truths which we legitimately believe, which we cannot but believe, but which we cannot prove by falling back upon anything simpler or surer than themselves. What are these truths? No question can be more distinct or more important.

A little reflection may convince us that a clear statement of our primary notions and first principles would tend to dispel many clouds from man's intellectual firmament. A map of the elevated table-land, whence all the sciences, like fertilising streams, take their rise, would confer immense advantage on every inquiring mind; it would accelerate the discoveries of the thoughtful, and facilitate the instruction of the thoughtless. If a philosopher shall attempt to prove by argument one of our fundamental assumptions (and how often has this been done?), his conclusion will be true, and may be admitted by all; but his logic will be at fault. In such a case, the mind is resting on a truth, which it has reached by a forced and illegitimate road. Again, if a philosopher shall assume what needs to be proved (and has this never been done?), his whole demonstration will be like a house

upon sand. If his fundamental position be not only illogically assumed, but in itself false;—not only *formally*, but *really*, erroneous, the superstructure will be nothing better than rubbish. The confounding, then, of assumptions and inferences,—of what *cannot* be proved and what *must* be proved,—the want of some well-defined line between these two widely different domains, has not only given support and vigour to numerous errors, but throws a dimness on the scientific or speculative aspect of every truth which mankind have hitherto embraced. No one proposition can be expounded and defended in a thoroughly scientific form till we can distinctly say: So much we assume; so much we prove or demonstrate by the help of these assumptions.

It is our conviction that the proposition which asserts the existence of God will be found to be itself one of our fundamental truths, or to be an immediate and obvious inference from them. Proceeding, then, on the hypothesis that this is the actual state of the case,—that God exists, and that He is the Creator of man, we shall throw out a few hints in regard to the ethical criterion.

The scientific criterion. The first point to be settled in this investigation is, What are the objects, of *all* which, and of which *alone*, virtue or vice (sin or holiness) is predicated. We shall call these objects *ethical*, to distinguish them from non-ethical objects, or those which are neither right nor wrong, and unworthy of either praise or blame. Ethical objects, we conceive, are

those living beings whose constitution is found to embrace the various elements of ethical discussion, such as, desire, action, volition, intelligence, and conscience. The ethical quality, or the function of accountability, attaches not to this or the other *part* of man, to this or that *development* of his nature, but to *man* himself. The question, then, what is the difference between virtue and vice, resolves itself into a more manageable question, what is the difference between a moral and an immoral being?

To answer this question, we must inquire what sort of a creature man is, as an ethical or responsible agent. As such he appears to us to be possessed of Desires, Actions, Intelligence, Will, and the Ethical Sentiment or Conscience.

As to the *Desires* of mankind they are either proper or improper, or to use words which may be found more precise, normal or abnormal. If there be harmony and agreement between the object which is desired, and the constitution and situation of the agent desiring it, the desire is suitable or normal. If there be no such accordance between ourselves and the things which we are desiring and wishing, our desires are unworthy and abnormal.

In regard to *Actions*, they admit of the same two-fold division as desires, for action, we are disposed to consider, is nothing else than the gratification of desire. Man never acts without a desire of some sort. If the desire gratified by an action be abnormal or normal, so is the action. It is well to notice that this distinction of our

desires and actions extends to every action and every desire. The inference is clear and weighty, that no action of an ethical or responsible being is indifferent.

The *Intelligence* possessed by an accountable being has such functions as the following to discharge. 1. To distinguish between his normal and abnormal desires and actions, and between the relative values of two normal desires when the gratification of both is impracticable. 2. To determine the fit and proper means to obtain the gratification of his desires. 3. To determine what are the final desires or ultimate aims worthy of his immortal nature.

Now in a responsible being desire does not pass into action without the interposition of his *Will*. In any case when the desire is passing into action, the agent either knows or he does not know, whether the desire he is contemplating the gratification of be normal or abnormal. If he does not know whether the desire be normal or abnormal, his ignorance is avoidable or unavoidable. If his ignorance be unavoidable, he is not responsible; if it be avoidable he is blameworthy. We suppose, therefore, that when an ethical being is about to will the gratification of a desire, he knows whether that desire be normal or abnormal. On this supposition four distinct manifestations of ethical agency will emerge. 1. The desire of the agent may be normal and his belief or knowledge respecting it may also be normal; that is, the desire may be really good and the agent be right in believing it to be good. Let such a *volition* as this be called *normal*.

2. The desire may be abnormal and the belief regarding it normal ; that is, the desire may be actually bad, and the agent know very well that it is bad, and yet gratify it. Let such a volition be called *directly abnormal*. 3. It is possible that while the desire is in itself normal, the belief of the agent respecting it may be abnormal ; that is, an action may be lawful enough in itself, while an individual believes it to be unlawful. The commission of an action in such circumstances involves guilt. This volition must be designated like the former *directly abnormal*. 4. It is very common for a desire to be abnormal and a man's belief regarding it abnormal too ; in other words, an action may be wrong and the agent may consider it right. This volition will be recognised as *abnormal indirectly*.

This statement assumes it to be a fact, that the will of a responsible being does not always follow the dictates of his understanding in gratifying his desires, and also that in this neglect to obey the voice of reason lies the essence of guilt. We are thus led to such conclusions as the following :—

The first guilt of an ethical being consists in gratifying an irregular or abnormal desire, while he knows that it is such, and has power to refrain from the gratification.

One abnormal volition, or one guilty action as just described, constitutes an ethical being immoral ; or, conversely, he only is a moral or virtuous agent all whose volitions are normal, or who has never committed a transgression.

A moral agent, without any marvellous stretch of his

understanding, but in the ordinary and easy use of it, while believing that his actions are normal, believes at the same time, that they are agreeable to the will of God and conducive to his own best welfare.

The only way in which an ethical being can certainly know what is normal or right in desire and action is by the use of his understanding in examining the nature of himself and the objects of his desire, or by some authorised manifestation of his Maker's will.

The only legitimate way in which man, as a responsible being, can pursue his good upon the whole is by pursuing what he knows to be right, in the manner just indicated.

It would occupy too much of your time at present to specify the various features of the immoral agent, or to state the different steps by which we have been led to these conclusions. Let it suffice to sum up the character of the virtuous or moral agent. It consists not only in a permanent and paramount desire to conform, but also in actually conforming, in every thing, to the dictates of his reason or to some authentic promulgation of the will of his Maker, by which course, as he knows, his own true welfare is best consulted. The dictates of his reason may be supplemented, but are never opposed, by the manifested will of God. By a perpetual and dutiful attention to the good and righteous pleasure of the Most High when made known, or, in the absence of such, to the teaching of his own understanding, an individual will continue in that state of happiness and perfection, of which

his nature is capable, and which his Creator intended that he should enjoy. Every movement of this perfect creature will reflect honour upon Him whose workmanship he is. The moral being will perceive that such is the fact, and will desire that so it should be. His every act, whether simply in accordance with the understanding which God has given him, or in obedience to some express Divine command, is thus homage directly and worthily rendered to Deity. Whether, therefore, the issue of his conduct or the intention of his heart be considered, it would appear that whatever the moral agent does, he does it to the glory of his God.

These principles may be vindicated, we think, on strictly philosophical or scientific ground. Grant us these, or some such principles as these, and we feel as if we might hopefully undertake, with the aid also of the conclusions to which we have been brought in the different preceding discussions, to vindicate the cause of Christianity against all deistical objections. If, however, everything in the form of an ethical basis or moral criterion, which is supposed to be common to both parties be refused, the controversy, as we have been led to see by actual observation, must prove to be endless and unsatisfactory.

CONCLUSION.

REASON AND FAITH;
THEIR CLAIMS WITHOUT CONFLICT.

(Theologus loquitur.)

THERE are two facts which have been elicited in these discussions, and which cannot but be familiar to the readers of the higher literature of the age, and which are as pregnant with interest as they are palpable to observation. The first of these facts is this, that, in the discussion of religious and ethical questions, those who hold the same conclusions, or contend for the same great truths, are not substantially agreed in their statements of the main arguments by which their common position is supported. The second fact that obtrudes itself, and which is probably a consequence of the first, is this, that on some points, which are generally and justly regarded as of the utmost practical importance, the most intelligent and religious among mankind are found to be not only of various sentiments, but in actual collision and conflict.

Those who maintain the validity of natural religion,

for example, are not agreed as to the doctrines which it embraces; and what is more, they are not at one in stating the evidence of those doctrines which they in common believe it to embrace. This want of agreement consists not merely in variety of language and illustration, or in a different arrangement of topics, or in any other diversity of inferior moment, but also not unfrequently in direct and unqualified contradiction. Some, for instance, deny that the assertion of Divine existence either requires or admits of proof; some again affirm that proof is needed and must be adduced. Among the latter class one finds sufficient evidence in himself; another denies this, and finds sufficient evidence only in the material universe; and a third rejects both opinions, and finds his belief in Deity warranted only by taking a conjoined view of himself and the world of matter. The conclusiveness of the argument from design is maintained by some and refused by others.

In like manner, if we look into the literature which expounds the evidence in favour of Christianity being a religion from God, we observe not only diversity but opposition, not only variety but contradiction. Some contend that sufficient evidence for the divine origin of the Bible lies, and must lie, within the book itself. Others maintain that the historic evidence is at once necessary and of itself sufficient. These last, moreover, are by no means harmonious in their modes of developing the historic argument. Some assert that miracles are of themselves sufficient to authenticate a divine commission or

message ; while others affirm that the evidence of miracles is imperfect, and requires to be supplemented by the virtuous character of the messenger, and the verisimilitude of his message.

This repugnance or contrariety of sentiment and judgment appears not only in unfolding the evidences of religion, but also in explaining and inculcating religious truths ; that is, not only in discussing more abstruse and speculative problems, but also in enforcing the most fundamental and onerous duties. The question, what is faith, gives rise to much controversy, and carries us immediately into the depths of philosophy and among the momentous practical realities of our responsibility. The ingenuous mind, while yet standing on the threshold of Christianity and trembling on the confines of eternal bliss or woe, is perplexed and almost confounded by noticing, that among the most reputable disciples of Christ contradictory opinions prevail, as to what that act is by which he should become a Christian. Some doctors assure him that it is in itself a mere intellectual act, while others protest against this view as most erroneous and dangerous. We need only allude to such controversies as those respecting the freedom of the will, the extent of human depravity consequent on the fall of Adam, the nature of Divine inspiration, the extent of Christ's atonement, and the duty of Civil Government in relation to Christianity. Conflicting opinions have not only been adopted on these and other points, but the holders of these contradictory sentiments have each

believed and maintained, that the reception of his own view and the rejection of its opposite was identified with the integrity of truth and the weightiest interests of men. Hence it appears that the most intelligent and devoted followers of Christ, even with a written revelation of the divine will in their hands, are frequently found to be mutually and diametrically opposed, while discussing the most significant truths and enforcing the most urgent duties.

The contradictions prevalent among Christian men resolve themselves, however, into disputes in speculative philosophy, ethical science, or grammatical interpretation. Whatever disadvantages, therefore, Christians labour under in consequence of the mutual repugnance of some of their views, they occupy an *intellectual* position in no respect inferior to that occupied by the general students of philosophy, ethics, and language. The controversies, that have disturbed schools and colleges and learned men, are necessarily transferred to the arena of the Christian Church, or spring up spontaneously there, because the topics of discussion are fundamentally common to both those parties.

While revolving these facts the question arises, is there any reasonable prospect that these controversies, some or all of them, shall terminate,—these contradictions disappear, — and the truth, hitherto half-concealed, shine forth in a form so distinct and in colours so brilliant as to win the conviction of every honest mind? A full and satisfactory answer to this question involves many con-

siderations, and calls for the removal of some weighty objections. But that the question must be answered in the affirmative will on reflection be doubted by few.

Every thoughtful man will at once reject the supposition, that conflicting sentiments, especially on the matters that have been specified, should continue for ever unreduced, and fill human society with distraction. Such a supposition seems to imply, that one chief end for which intelligent beings like men have been created, is to be intellectual gladiators. We may indeed admit that intellectual conflict will be eternal, if it be also conceded, that the ground of conflict will be ever changing, that whenever a dispute is terminated by the establishment of truth, a new contest will arise only to issue in a fresh victory. But to imagine that intelligent beings shall exhaust their immortal energies in mutual contradictions on questions of moment is monstrously absurd. If through the lapse of countless ages there will always be found problems to exercise man's increasing powers, and if controversies will be ever emerging to stimulate his powers to their utmost intensity, it can only be by new difficulties appearing after the old have vanished. No drudgery can be conceived more painful or degrading, than endless disputation and collision on a vital problem that shall remain for ever unresolved.

While our speculative or theoretic contradictions are in themselves intolerable to every well-constituted mind, they assume a graver and more urgent character, when they are seen in many cases to be identified with our

practical quarrels, and thus form the most formidable difficulty in the way of social improvement. The mutual antagonism of professed friends is, in every sphere of human life, always more disastrous than the attacks of open enemies. It is the internal weakness or inherent inconsistency of many promising schemes of usefulness, rather than the outward force of opponents, that defeats them, and consequently retards the amelioration of society. Philanthropy herself, therefore, is pleading and waiting, bathed in tears, for the cessation of strife, and the propitious announcement that the friends of truth have sheathed their internecine swords, and are marching one in hand, and one in heart, because they have become one in knowledge and belief, to overcome and bless the world. While we are looking for this great consummation, it is not irrelevant to ask, how is it that in so many cases the truth is so slow in triumphing and the conflict so fiercely prolonged? One reason not uninfluential will, we apprehend, be found to be this, that he who holds the truth in one particular, in others holds what is erroneous; in other words, the defender of one special truth is not, in all his opinions or convictions, consistent with himself and with truth.

Truth, we must assume, is a whole of many parts, which are neither disconnected nor disjointed, neither isolated nor thrown together in confusion. As there is a profound harmony between each truth and every other truth, so every erroneous proposition will come into conflict, more or less directly, with one or more propositions

that are true. If then on any occasion a particular truth, held intelligently by one man, be assailed or denied by another man, the strength of the assault will lie very materially in the false assumptions or erroneous propositions held by the defender of the truth, and introduced in the course of his defence. Let a truth be distinctly stated, let its evidence be sufficient and fairly marshalled, and let the mind give due attention to that evidence, and the intellect will yield acquiescence. From the very nature of the case, then, it would appear, that the chief or only ground on which the denial of any truth can make a plausible and effectual stand is the error or errors that are mingled with the defence and exposition of that truth. All experience seems to confirm the correctness of this remark.

Besides, the only conceivable way in which a man can be rationally convinced of being in error is by making manifest to himself his own inconsistency. If an individual can be led to see that one of his beliefs contradicts another of his beliefs, or, which is much the same thing, that the evidence which he admits in one case he refuses in another case, or that the principle which he applies in one instance he rejects or ignores in another instance, he is thereby constrained to acknowledge his error; and in no other possible way can he be induced, at once freely and intelligently, to make such an acknowledgment. Every *real* difficulty, therefore, with which man as an intelligent being has to contend, will, we think, be found resolving itself, more or less speedily, into a self-contradiction. What we do *not* know can never come into

conflict with what we *do* know. An unsolved question cannot shake or unsettle a question that is solved. Abnormal ignorance, or not knowing what we should know, issues in transgression, which is a practical error. But error in all its forms impinges against truth. The clashing of two knowledges or beliefs in the mind, (as well as collision between outward conduct and inward conviction), is the effectual test of the presence of error, and is the one great danger which an intelligent being has to fear.

Scepticism, whether religious or philosophical, is best refuted, nay, can be effectually refuted only, by its own inconsistency. Universal doubt destroys itself. To affirm an universal negation is obviously suicidal. On the other hand, there is not probably a single man living who is not a disbeliever or sceptic in part,—that is, there is no man of whom it may be said that he is ignorant of no truth which he might and ought to believe, or that he holds no error which he might and ought to reject. But when any one becomes a professed sceptic, or makes it his business to assail truths which are held intelligently by his fellows, the vigour of the assault lies in the errors which are received by them. It is difficult to conceive how pure truth in its abstract discrete state, should be attacked argumentatively by an intelligent being; but it is easy to perceive how it may be opposed in a concrete or agglomerate condition. If these views be at all correct, it appears that the only foothold of scepticism, excepting that of unblushing wickedness and vice, is the blunders and mistaken admissions of the friends of truth. The

only seasoned or dressed food of Disbelief consists in the self-inconsistencies and mutual contradictions of those who Believe.

It has been said, as we have seen, with too much accuracy, that the argument, that is, the *scientific* argument, in favour of Christianity may be summed up in this statement, that there are fewer difficulties in receiving, than in rejecting, the Bible. But then what is meant by a difficulty? It means either an incomprehensibility, a mystery, something too high for the understanding to scale; or it means an inconsistency, a contradiction, something that the understanding rejects. It has been shewn that to affirm that there are fewer *mysteries* in Christianity than in infidelity, is no argument in favour of the one against the other. For there are mysteries on our right hand and on our left wherever we go. Nor is at all an unlikely thing that truth may have more mysteries than falsehood. To affirm that Christianity has fewer *contradictions* than infidelity is not true. There are no contradictions or self-inconsistencies in the Christian religion itself; if there were, it ought not to be believed. But there are contradictions in scepticism; and these contradictions form the only available argument for its refutation. To affirm that the arguments usually urged in favour of Christianity have fewer contradictions than the arguments against Christianity, is, we fear, too correct. The urgent inference from which is this, that the defenders of Christianity will most effectually meet and repulse the assaults of unbelief and disbelief, by re-

examining their own positions and banishing from their camp every traitorous error.

The following is the closing sentence of "The Restoration of Belief." "If now the question be put to me, whether my Christian Belief enable me to rid myself of that burden of far-reaching care and trouble which I share with the thoughtful of all ages,—my reply is this—In truth I have not found the means of ridding myself of this burden; but in the Gospels I have found Him in communion with whom I am learning how to bear it; and thus I hope to bear it to the end, still retaining my faith and trust in God as supremely Good and Wise — 'a Just God and a Saviour.' " Now this burden is composed of mysteries or of contradictions; it is something that merely transcends, or something that rudely shocks, our intelligence. If the former, it is no burden at all, at least it ought not to be felt as such. It is no hardship to be a finite creature. But if it be the latter, and it is the latter, and not the former, which has been, and still is, the real burden shared by all the thoughtful, then while the Gospels teach us how to bear even that burden whilst it rests upon us, they teach us also how to labour and hope for its removal.

There is a considerable number of able and intelligent men who affirm, that we cannot get quit of our contradictions, that we cannot even hope to escape from them,—that we must believe in propositions which contradict each other, or which at least seem to do so. For example, it has been said, "the theologian, like every

other deep thinker, must believe and act upon propositions that seem contradictory to intelligence because it is finite, and that can be proved to seem thus in consequence of its finitude.”¹ Here we have the old fallacy which confounds ignorance and error, — contradiction and mystery. As finite creatures, we must be in ignorance of many things. But if it be said that as the direct and necessary consequence of our being created, and not uncreated, we believe in contradictory statements or in error, we asperse the Divine character, or entirely destroy finite intelligence. But the quotation does not say “propositions that *are* contradictory ;” it says “propositions that *seem* contradictory.” This evasion has been already exposed. If the propositions are contradictory in appearance only, and not in reality, how do we know this? Supposing that we do know that their contradiction is a mere shadow without a substance, then they are not contradictory, and why should they *seem* to be what they *are not*? Why should they *seem* to us to be what *we know* they *are not*? If the propositions which we must accept as true be contradictory *only* in appearance, we ought to make them appear as they really are. To believe propositions that in fact contradict each other, is to be in error.

It cannot, therefore, we think, for a moment be doubted that it is not only highly desirable, but also strongly obligatory upon all the friends of truth, that they endeavour to extricate themselves from their an-

¹ Fraser's Essays in Philosophy, Edin. 1856, pp. 319, 320.

tagonistic opinions and beliefs,—that is, from prominent and prejudicial errors, which they, or some of them at least, are embracing. It will as little be doubted that the proper and effectual method to secure this auspicious consummation, is for each lover of truth, each genuine philosopher, each honest believer, to seek devoutly and diligently to disencumber himself of his own inconsistencies.

Suppose now that an individual sets himself to the noble but arduous task, of eliminating from his stock of knowledge all contrariety, and rejecting from among his beliefs all contradiction, what is the process which he must pursue, and what the first step which he must take? He must analyse his knowledge, reduce it to its elementary parts, and assort them in order. When we have to deal with a number of articles, we can avoid confusion only by adopting an accurate arrangement. In like manner discord can be banished from the mind only by a systematic classification of our beliefs. If a man's beliefs are lying in his mind in a disorderly and random state, he may easily and frequently contradict himself without immediate consciousness of the contradiction, and find out his blunder only by tasting the bitterness of its fruits. But if our beliefs be methodically digested and disposed, a collision between any two of them will be readily and sensibly felt, and if not entirely prevented may be checked with comparative ease.

In attempting to arrange our knowledges or beliefs, the most prominent classification that occurs is this:—

Some of our beliefs are primary, fundamental, self-evident, independent; others are derived from, or dependent upon, the first, and are, therefore, secondary, demonstrable, or susceptible of proof extraneous to themselves. It thus appears that *the only effectual and reasonable way in which man, as an intelligent being, can hope to avoid self-inconsistency is by attempting to determine what are his primary or original beliefs.*

The well-informed reader will at once perceive that this statement of the manner in which our knowledges are to be harmonized, and the burden of our contradictions removed, is precisely the statement of the great problem of speculative philosophy. There are, as all perceive, certain principles without the admission of which all reasoning is impossible. It seems, therefore, to be the preliminary question in philosophy to determine what these principles are. Every one of the modern sciences is based upon some of these principles virtually, if not avowedly. It may, therefore, with propriety be affirmed, that any science which proceeds without stating these assumed principles, but taking them for granted silently, and probably in a loose and inaccurate form, is so far unscientific. An orderly and correct enunciation of first principles would, as we have already had occasion to remark, obviously contribute to the stability and enlargement of the stock of human knowledge, while it is urgently demanded by the intellectual instincts of our nature, and is the only achievement that can give something like symmetry and completion to our philosophy.

Bút few vigorous and well-directed attempts, we fear, have been made to meet this want; and hence it would not be difficult to shew, that in all the physical sciences, and even in the pure mathematics, which is the most exact science of all, there are assumptions found whose language is vague, and of which no methodical account is rendered. Moreover, as new discoveries in the sciences are constantly bringing us to higher and more extensive principles, and as each science has more or less intimate connection with every other science, the unavoidable result of progress in the Inductive sciences, both of mind and matter, is to force upon our attention the problem of our fundamental beliefs, and to conduct us onward towards at least an approximate solution.

The question, then, of our primary beliefs cannot be evaded, unless we are willing to arrest the progress of philosophy, abandon the hope of attaining self-consistency, and despair of being able to act intelligently and rightly in the more complicated and perplexing circumstances of practical life. These primitive beliefs or knowledges are found in *a concrete state*, pervading the common sentiments of mankind. The opinions of the vulgar and illiterate are interwoven with them; they are the warp of all our knowledge. There is an implicit, undeveloped metaphysic or philosophy in every man's mind; and if it be not the true, it is a false philosophy.

The remarks that follow are intended as a contribution towards the solution of one of the elements of this great

problem, namely, to elucidate the true nature of knowledge and faith, in one of their aspects.

The antithesis, *truth, error*, is obtained, as we have already stated, by observing that a proposition agrees or disagrees with its object. If the affirmation and negation involved in the proposition be exactly in accordance with the object, and, so far as it is described, describe it *as it is*, this agreement is truth, and the proposition so agreeing with its object is true. On the other hand, if the object spoken of do not precisely tally or correspond with what is affirmed and denied respecting it, this disagreement is error, and such proposition is erroneous.

Every proposition is thus either true or erroneous. There is no possible exception. The proposition is as its object, or it is not. In the one case, it is true; in the other case, it is erroneous or false.

The objection taken by Kant to this definition of truth seems to be unfounded. "If truth," he says, "consist in the accordance of a cognition with its object, this object thereby must thus be separated from others; for a cognition is false, if it do not agree with the object to which it refers, although it contains something which may certainly be valid for other objects. Now, a general criterion of Truth would be that which was valid for all cognitions, without distinction of their objects. But it is clear, that as we make abstraction by this of all content of cognition (reference to its object), and Truth relates exactly to this content, it is quite impossible and absurd to inquire after a mark of the truth of this content of

cognitions,—and consequently, that a sufficient, and, moreover, at the same time, general characteristic of the truth, cannot possibly be given. As we have already before called the content of a cognition its matter, we are thus compelled to say that no universal characteristic can be expected of the truth of the cognition in respect to its matter, since this is in itself contradictory.”¹ This argument is based upon the author’s doctrine of *pure reason*, and must stand or fall with it. It cannot stand, if Sir W. Hamilton’s doctrine of perception be admitted, and if consciousness be regarded as trustworthy. If a man can know an object immediately (presentative knowledge), whether internal or external to himself, and if in thus knowing he does not necessarily deceive himself, then the statement that truth consists in the agreement between our knowledge, or the proposition in which that knowledge is expressed, and its object, affords an obvious rule or canon, and the only conceivable one, by which all minds can test the accuracy of all knowledge. Hence, also, to consider “cognitions without distinction of their objects,” instead of leading us to a “general criterion of Truth,” actually ignores and excludes the truth. Has Kant ever told us what truth is? In denying the possibility of a sufficient and general characteristic of the truth, he virtually denies that there is any such thing as truth.

Kant’s own criteria, which he gives in the next para-

¹ Kant’s Critic. Trans. by Haywood. London, 1848, p. 54.

graph, extend, as he acknowledges, only to the *form* of knowledge, and amount to this, that a man's thoughts are to be consistent with each other. We do not know that he provides or points out means by which one man's views may be known to be in harmony with his neighbour's. To do this would be empiricism; it would cast a spot upon the *purity* of reason. To be self-consistent is a great attainment; but it is eviscerated of all meaning and value, if the condition of its attainment be a complete isolation of each individual from all around him;—if each possessor of ideas be the universe, and the universe a bundle of ideas. It was vain for Kant to go in search of Truth, after he had in his fundamental principles ignored, or rather excluded it. The same great error runs through the bulk of the German Philosophy.

More particularly, first, as to knowledge. It is clearly impossible for an intelligent being to take a true proposition to be erroneous, or an erroneous proposition to be true, *at the very time* that he perceives the true proposition to be true, or the erroneous proposition to be erroneous. If, then, there be such a phenomenon as a man's taking an erroneous proposition to be true, and such a phenomenon is, alas! too common, it implies, that though the proposition be really erroneous, the man in making or accepting it does not perceive, or think, or know, that it is erroneous.

The fact now stated being admitted, as it will undoubtedly be, it is no empty question to inquire, how is

this phenomenon to be accounted for? It must be traced either to an original defect in the constitution of the mind that adopts such a proposition, or to the abuse of its undefective powers by the mind itself. Since a proposition in itself erroneous can never be embraced as such, or directly, by an intelligent being; in other words, since a man can never call white black, knowing it to be white, the phenomenon generally named error must be the inevitable yet indirect result of some weakness or perversion in the understanding; and this weakness or perversion in the understanding must either be connate and constitutional, or self-induced in some way or other by intelligent beings themselves. If it be affirmed that the weakness or defect of mind which leads a man to call an erroneous proposition true is constitutional, and belongs to him as a creature in the state in which he came from the hands of his Creator, it is obvious that a serious charge is thus brought against the most High God. But if we affirm that such a perversion of intellect is in some form or other self-induced, inasmuch as such self-injury involves a degree of folly and guilt, we shall be able to vindicate the character and government of God by throwing the criminality upon the creature. Assuming that there is no question which of these two theories is to be preferred, we are led to the distinction which has been already introduced to your consideration, namely, that *knowledge* which takes a true proposition to be true, and an erroneous proposition to be erroneous, is *normal*, and that knowledge which takes an erroneous

proposition to be true, or a true proposition to be erroneous, is *abnormal*.

It is worthy of special notice, as we saw, that *ignorance*, as well as knowledge, may be either *normal* or *abnormal*. When a man is ignorant of the truth or erroneusness of a proposition, or, which is the same thing, ignorant of an object, which by a little care he might and ought to have known, his ignorance is abnormal and culpable. Since, on the other hand, there are many objects which we have no means of knowing, many propositions of which, using all diligence, we can affirm neither the truth nor the falsehood, in regard to these objects or propositions, ignorance is proper and becoming, and therefore normal. We agree with those who regard it as one of the greatest philosophical problems of the day, and one of our most urgent practical necessities, to determine when we should be ignorant,—to fix the limits of a “prudent nescience.”

As it is not by any means uncommon to confound error, or what we have just called abnormal knowledge, with ignorance, so the distinction between normal and abnormal ignorance is perhaps as frequently overlooked or disregarded. These two mistakes have a tendency to produce and reproduce each other, and they both lead, especially when combined together, as they have often been, to the most perplexing and painful consequences. Illustrations of this have been given, and more could be easily found, but we must hasten to our conclusion.

It now becomes a most important question, has an

intelligent being the power of distinguishing between his normal and abnormal knowledges, and between his normal and abnormal ignorances? If he has not, what is the meaning of intelligence? To deny that a man who will act uprightly and deal fairly with himself can certainly distinguish between what he knows he knows, and what he only thinks or fancies that he knows, is surely to make the understanding something like an unsubstantial shadow or an empty shell, or to extinguish it altogether. The great and chief function of intelligence can be none else than to discriminate the true and the false. When intelligence is legitimately used, it makes this discrimination infallibly, or feels that it cannot make it. When the true and the erroneous are not accurately distinguished by the understanding, or when the understanding attempts to distinguish them in cases that are beyond its power, the understanding is abused. But, then, it is impossible to conceive of intelligence apart from *consciousness*; and if consciousness be not fallacious, when a man misuses his intelligence he must know that he is doing so; and therefore all men, if they will act conscientiously, may succeed in severing their normal knowledge and normal ignorance from what is abnormal.

By consciousness is meant a man's knowledge of everything that takes place within himself. Whatever a man does or says or thinks or knows, he knows what he is doing, saying, thinking, or knowing. This knowledge is *immediate*; whatever a man does, then and

there he knows what he is doing; it is not the knowledge of what he did yesterday, but of what he is doing *now*. The knowledge of consciousness is *universal* in regard to the individual himself; if it do not comprehend the whole sphere of our activity, to the extent of this deficiency we shall cease to be responsible. For unless we know what we are doing, so as knowingly to come up to, or fall short of, what we know to be right, we cannot in such a case be regarded as accountable. Consciousness is *infallible*; for if it deceive us, it deceives us either always or only occasionally. If consciousness *always* deceives us, our knowledge is in every instance abnormal, and truth is for ever hidden from our eyes; for then *when we know* an object, *we do not know* that we know it, and *when we do not know* an object, *we know* that we know it. If consciousness deceive *occasionally only*, then we can distinguish between the occasions in which we are deceived and those in which we are not deceived, or we cannot distinguish between them. If we can distinguish between them, that is, if we know when we are misled and when we are not, then in fact consciousness does not deceive us at all. But if we cannot distinguish between them, then we shall be found trusting consciousness when we should distrust her, and distrusting her when she should be trusted. On this supposition, intelligence is a mockery and the possession of it a pure misfortune.

If it be the proper function of the understanding to adopt true propositions, to reject erroneous propositions,

and to pause and be ignorant when neither the truth nor erroneousness of a proposition is known, there is an obvious and not unimportant sense in which reason may be said to be *impersonal*. To call anything impersonal may mean—1, that it is not a person ; or 2, that it does not belong to any person ; or 3, that it does not belong to any one individual or class of persons exclusively.

When Victor Cousin pleads, as he so earnestly does, for the impersonality of reason, he chiefly uses the word in the first or the second of the three meanings just specified. His opinion seems to be that reason is not a person, or rather does not even belong to a person, but is identical with the eternal substance before it comes to self-consciousness or personality in the creation of the world. His doctrine of the impersonality of reason is closely connected with his distinction between spontaneous and reflective reason, and with the monism and transcendental intuition of the German school. For the rejection of all these views many and weighty arguments might be easily adduced.

Reason is impersonal in this sense that it does not belong to any one individual or class of persons exclusively. Truth is universal, eternal, and immutable ; what is once true, is true everywhere and always. Reason, inasmuch as it is conversant with truth, is not peculiar to one individual or one class, but is common to all minds. Truth is not the creature of my volition, or of any volition. Neither is intelligence, abstractly considered, the creature of volition, but the means, and the only instru-

ment or means, by which truth can be perceived and appreciated.

My possession of a certain degree of intelligence is the gift of God, and my responsibility lies in the use which I make of this gift. The way, then, in which we shall employ our reason being the hinge of our responsibility, and, therefore, a matter of choice, the actual employment of it may be either legitimate or illegitimate. In the legitimate or proper use of the understanding all our knowledges and ignorances are of course normal. But when we use our reason improperly, then what is true is confounded in our minds with what is not true, and what we may know with what we cannot know. Since truth is catholic and unchanging, and ever consistent with herself, so also will reason or intelligence be in all her teachings so long as she is used legitimately. Men using their understandings aright would never contradict themselves nor contradict one another. The exclusion of *contradiction* from our sentiments is not to be understood, you will remember, as excluding all sorts of *diversity* and *variety* of opinion in matters of probability. Reason, then, when duly exercised, cannot be supposed to teach truth which shall be held as the peculiar property of any party; and her real impersonality consists simply in this, that her doctrines, however numerous or varied, are always catholic to the sincere, and harmonious with each other.

On the other hand, when reason is misused, her teachings, or rather what passes for her teachings, are found

to be contradictory with each other. But error is not universal in any of its forms; much less in one of them. To employ reason illegitimately by attempting to pass the due limits of knowledge, or by confounding truth and error within those limits, is not characteristic of all intelligent beings, but is limited to some of them, and is, therefore, peculiar and personal. Abnormal knowledge or erroneous judgment, then, is not to be traced to anything that God has given, or failed to give, to an intelligent being, but to the improper use which that intelligent being has chosen to make of the gift of God, and, therefore, in an obvious sense personal.¹

Though the exercise of our understanding, whether legitimate or illegitimate, be thus dependent upon the will or voluntary, it must not be forgotten, as already intimated, that, no erroneous judgment whatever can be voluntary *directly*. For to take an erroneous proposition to be true, knowing it to be erroneous, is impossible. But the common opinion that any error is involuntary and invincible, as it is generally held, is equally inadmissible. This opinion not only asperses the character of God, but is, strictly speaking, self-contradictory. Nothing seems to be plainer than this mode of stating the case, that if an intelligent creature in forming his sentiments confounds what is true with what is erroneous involuntarily, inevitably and unblamably, the intelligent Creator must be held responsible for the defective character or unpro-

¹ "Tu fecisti eum, et peccatum non fecisti in eo." God made man, and did not make sin in him.—Augustine. Conf. Lib. i. c. 7.

pitious circumstances of his creature. But more than this, if erroneous judgment be, even in a single instance, strictly and absolutely involuntary and invincible on the part of him who adopts it, there are no means left to him whereby he may distinguish the erroneous from the true. If, notwithstanding the use of all proper diligence and precaution on my part, I may yet, without the consent of my will and altogether unconsciously, take what is true to be erroneous or what is erroneous to be true, then I can never feel certain that I have found the truth. On such a supposition, consciousness itself deceives me, and my very nature is a lie.

We shrink not, therefore, from the assertion that human reason rightly or conscientiously employed is at once supreme and infallible.

By reason, however, we mean reason practical, as well as reason speculative. Truth is the end of the latter, action of the former. In the one case we know that we may know; in the other, we know that we may act. These two functions of the understanding, however, are not to be subordinated the one to the other, as they have often been, and with the most ruinous consequences. They are to be considered not only as distinct, but also as co-ordinate in authority; and hence it is nothing but a vain, proud boast to say, that "philosophy is the light of all lights, the authority of all authorities."

The human understanding has two fields in which to expatiate, the written and the unwritten revelations of God; she has two volumes to study, the Bible and the

book of nature. Reason, moreover, entirely severed from both of these, can learn nothing and know nothing. It is, therefore, an equal perversion of the plain facts of the case, to set reason against the word of God, or the word of God against reason; or to set the volume of nature against the volume of inspiration, or the volume of inspiration against the volume of nature.

Reason *per se* has nothing that can by any possibility be contrary to the statements of the Bible or to the facts of nature; her function lies simply in the reception and apprehension of both of them. And there cannot be a greater absurdity than to suppose, that what the understanding learns from one divine revelation may be contradicted by what it learns from another divine revelation. But though the declarations of Scripture fairly interpreted can never be in conflict with the fair deductions of natural science, it is worse than childish to deny that reason can learn from the one revelation truths which she could never learn from the other. It ought never to be forgotten, moreover, that reason may gather in both revelations many propositions, of which we clearly and surely know *that* they are true, while we feel altogether baffled and confounded in the very attempt to know *how* they are true.

It follows from what has now been said, that while reason cannot possess a higher authority than the word of God, neither does the word of God possess a higher authority than reason. The authority of reason is the infallibility of consciousness, which, in

other words, is the belief that God would not make us so as to trust a lie. The authority of reason, therefore, and the authority of the Bible, are identical ; they are both divine. How then can we speak of the one as superseding the other ?

It still further appears that reason in itself is not the source of any knowledge whatever. This is the proper answer to those who represent Scripture to be unnecessary, on the ground that reason is the only source of knowledge, or, as they say, the arbiter of all truth. To repel this objection, it is sufficient to say, that knowledge is not derived from the faculty of reason in an isolated state, but is acquired by the employment of reason on its appropriate objects. These objects, we have seen, are the all things within our intellectual range, mental and material. To deny that the Bible is one of those objects, and a most important one, is surely a delusion.

It is equally futile to assert that there is no certainty to man apart from the word of God. On those particular matters, of course, with which Scripture is specially conversant, we can expect certain knowledge only from written revelation. But if reason could not attain certainty in some things without the Bible, neither could she attain certainty in other things by means of the Bible. Nay, more, there are special truths lying at the foundation of all Bible teaching, which the inspired writers do not so much authoritatively announce as unobtrusively take for granted. And apart from these fundamental truths, the peculiar doctrines of the word

of God would lose all their significance. Many of the defenders of revelation in the present day, as well as its opponents, would do well to study the masculine writings of such men as John Howe. Speaking of the “non scripta, sed nata lex,” he remarks, “when we say the Scripture is a complete rule, we do not mean as severed and cut off from the law of nature, or in opposition to that, or as excluding that, but as including it, and as excluding only the unnecessary and arbitrary inventions of men, and the additions that they think fit to subnect to it.”

There is another grave mistake prevalent in some circles, when what is called mere reason is opposed to reason assisted by the grace of God. When our understanding is assisted by the gracious aid of our Maker, it is assisted but to fulfil its proper function, and not to transcend it. If our mental powers were in our present circumstances sufficient of themselves to lead us to the knowledge of all needful truth, Divine aid would neither be required nor given. If our intellect leads us astray, it is no longer *mere* reason, but perverted reason. But the only legitimate and effectual way in which those who accept the proffered assistance of divine grace can manifest the necessity and realization of this heavenly help, is by shewing that their opinions or convictions are agreeable to reason, and that the opposite opinions espoused by those who deny or reject this help are contrary to reason. If mere reason be pure or right reason, then, in man's corrupt state, it is only found in alliance with

God's Holy Spirit. But if mere reason be reason rejecting that divine aid which is both needed and offered, to suppose that it is right reason is absurd. And if it be not right reason, but reason abused, it is incumbent on the disciples of truth to trace it through all its wanderings, and expose its manifold errors. To assert that any one is *wrong* in *all* his opinions, is to deny his intelligence or responsibility. But there are certain important questions on which men can form accurate sentiments only by the aid of the Holy Spirit. Those who ask and accept this aid should be able to shew that on these questions their opinions are reasonable, and that the contrary opinions of those who reject this aid are unreasonable.

Hence we obtain an all-important conclusion, that not only Error and Truth, but also the adherents of error and the adherents of truth, ever are, and ever must be, in antagonism and conflict. To state the case more precisely, when of two intelligent beings the one takes a proposition to be true, and the other takes it to be false, each of them feels not only that there is a difference or contradiction between them of less or greater moment depending upon the nature of the question in dispute, but also that this opposition must be traced to a defect of judgment, or to a deficiency of candour in himself or in his opponent. In every controversy each disputant proceeds, and must necessarily proceed, on the assumption not only that his adversary is wrong, but also that if he would listen without prejudice to the arguments

adduced he would perceive his error and change his sentiments. It would be an act of intellectual suicide to attempt to convince another, unless we are well assured that our representations are such as will win to our opinion an honest and unbiassed mind.

It is one of the great heresies of the age to forget or deny this twofold antagonism between truth and error. This heresy has, as we have seen, two sides, both of which are almost equally fatal to philosophy and virtue. To allow that every man's opinion is true is no graver a mistake, than to allow that those who hold conflicting opinions are equally capable and equally conscientious in (not holding but) adopting their opinions. A deficient capacity exempts from responsibility; a deficient conscientiousness incurs guilt. In every vital and momentous dispute the opposing parties are seen to be driven, as by some unceasing necessity, to charge each other with a serious defect in intelligence or in honesty. No believer in Christianity allows that the unbeliever has, with ordinary ability, and due diligence and integrity, examined the Christian evidences. While a glance at infidel publications and arguments is sufficient to perceive the correctness of the remark, that "Christians must be fools or knaves, for the ease and comfort of those who reject Christianity." The same result is developed in every urgent and weighty discussion, though not always with the same unambiguous distinctness.

As this result seems to be replete with the most serious

inconveniences, having an apparently strong tendency to repress everything like good feeling, and to excite variance and hatred in society, the legitimacy of the result has been more or less openly negatived or evaded in a thousand forms. Many illustrations might be selected from our current literature, but we prefer one of older date. Locke, in his "Letter concerning toleration," goes so far in vindicating every man's right to think for himself, as virtually in some places to base this right upon the assumption that every man's opinion is true. This is clearly the case in his definition of heresy, which both in its scriptural and ecclesiastical sense means, and must mean, an opinion or opinions opposed to and subversive of the great and simple truths of the New Testament, on the intelligent and honest reception of which the salvation of those possessing the Bible depends. "Heresy," says Locke, "is a separation made in ecclesiastical communion between men of the same religion, for some opinions no way contained in the rule itself. Amongst those who acknowledge nothing but the Holy Scriptures to be the rule of faith, heresy is a separation made in their Christian communion for opinions not contained in the express words of Scripture." Locke here virtually, if not expressly, denies that there is such a phenomenon as a man professing to hold the exact words of Scripture, and rejecting the truths contained in these words; or, which is the same thing, that every man's interpretation of the Bible is sound and correct, or that each man's opinion is to all intents and purposes right.

It would be easy to multiply examples of the prevalence of this mistake on its other side. Nothing is more common than for disputants to exchange compliments of mutual respect, to allow concerning each other, not only that they are in their general character honourable men, but also conscientiously and earnestly seeking the truth in the particular matter under dispute. This mode of procedure is unexceptionable, provided no one holds any fixed sentiments at all, or all men regard every conclusion with like indifference. But as soon as men adopt principles, which are felt to be at once unspeakably momentous and directly antagonistic and exclusive, to reciprocate conventional phrases of sincerity, integrity, and honour, is to mock the majesty of truth and insult poor suffering humanity, as if truth and error were interchangeable epithets, or as if there were no perceptible or worthy difference between the mind that embraces truth and the mind that embraces error.

In connection with this point you will recollect that the proper foundation and nature of the virtues of charity and forbearance were in some degree made manifest.

Having thus endeavoured to point out the distinction between abnormal and normal knowledges, we now proceed, secondly, to advert to a similar distinction between our *beliefs*. Belief seems to us to be the immediate and invariable consequent of knowledge. Different kinds of belief will thus entirely depend upon the different kinds of knowledge; and since knowledge may be always expressed in a proposition, there will be no belief without

a proposition believed. It is, however, obviously improper and unusual to speak of believing a proposition when we only understand its meaning and do not know whether it be true or erroneous. To profess to believe a proposition to be true or erroneous without even perceiving its meaning, is as great hypocrisy as to profess to believe it to be true while regarding it as erroneous. To believe a proposition, then, clearly implies both that we comprehend its import and perceive it to be true; but not by any means that we know *how* it is true. Belief in a simple proposition containing one unambiguous affirmation is the most elementary form which faith assumes, to one or more instances of which every variety of trust or confidence may be easily reduced.

Some have supposed that belief should be restricted to those propositions whose truth we know by other means than by our own direct personal effort. This usage is not universal, nor is it founded on any obvious or sufficient reason. For it is quite as correct, grammatically and logically, to speak of belief resting on the evidence of our own senses, or on argument and deduction of our understanding, or on an intellectual intuition, as on the testimony of witnesses or on the declarations of divine authority.

Some, again, have proposed to limit the application of faith or belief to propositions connected with religion or the Bible. But this restriction is equally destitute of the sanction of reason and custom. Indeed the objects of belief are co-extensive with the objects of knowledge.

If belief is to be classified by its objects, there will be no end to the division. All beliefs are, subjectively and fundamentally, one and the same—the acceptance by the mind of a proposition known to be true. For example, there seems to be no valid distinction between theological faith and metaphysical or philosophical faith. Theological faith is belief in a proposition which we know to be true on the authority of the Word of God. Metaphysical or philosophical faith is belief in a proposition which we know to be true on the authority of our own understanding. In both cases we *must* know *that* the proposition is true; in neither case may we know *how* it is true. The proposition believed must be known as true, but may also involve something *incomprehensible*. There is obviously no real difference between these two beliefs; for we cannot trust our understanding without trusting God whose gift it is, nor can we trust the Word of God without trusting our own understanding, by which alone we can comprehend the declarations of God.

Misbelief cannot be distinguished from disbelief, which is the denial that a proposition (believed by others) is true. Unbelief or doubt is properly the state of mind in regard to a proposition which is not perceived to be either true or erroneous. Hence we infer that *belief* or *faith* implies an affirmation or knowledge that a proposition is true; *disbelief* or *misbelief* implies the knowledge that a proposition is erroneous; while unbelief or doubt is the immediate and invariable consequent of ignorance, or the refusal of the mind to make an affirmation either as to

the truth or erroneousness of a proposition. Disbelief and unbelief, like error and ignorance, are often used indiscriminately, with the not unfrequent result of much confusion and evil.

Belief and its compounds are often used *objectively*, that is, for the matter accepted or rejected by the mind. This is a secondary use of the words, with which we have at present nothing to do.

Since faith or belief, as we have seen, always presupposes knowledge, it cannot be a *source* of knowledge. "No man can *apprehend as true*, what *he does not apprehend at all*." It is a contradiction to say that a man can believe what he does not know to be true. And though, as has been already remarked, we must be often content to believe without knowing the *mode*, the *how*, the *philosophy* of what we believe; yet are we traitors to truth, and to our own understanding, and to God himself, when we believe, or rather profess to believe that, of the truth of which we have not an intelligent persuasion.

Some have distinguished between knowledge and faith as if the former implied or was equivalent to *certainty*, and the latter could boast of nothing higher than *probability*. The remarks already made are sufficient to shew, that though these words may be sometimes so used in popular discourse, such usage is not general nor unattended with disadvantage; nor are there any arguments sufficient to justify it, or render it universal.

We have seen that there are normal and abnormal

knowledges; corresponding to these there are *normal* and *abnormal beliefs*. If we have succeeded in proving that there is no such thing as involuntary or invincible error, it follows that there is no such thing as an irresponsible belief.

In addition to what has been already advanced against the doctrine of involuntary error, it may be further maintained, that if it be conceded that man is responsible for *any* of his beliefs, it will follow that he is responsible for *all* his beliefs, unless some important and well-marked distinction can be pointed out between the beliefs for which we are responsible and those for which we are not responsible. Now, no such distinction has, in fact, been pointed out and substantiated; nor do we think that it is possible to do so.

No man believes a proposition, whatever he may pretend, till he knows or fancies that it is true. If the proposition be actually true, then an individual in knowing it, and believing it, to be true, acts the proper part of an intelligent being, and worthily acquits himself of his responsibility. But if the proposition be not really true, and notwithstanding this an individual allow himself to think that it is true, then undoubtedly his knowledge and belief are both abnormal, and who shall say that guilt is not incurred. That when knowledge and belief are thus abnormal, guilt is frequently at least incurred, is generally admitted, and we shall therefore for the present take this for granted. If it be said that when belief is abnormal guilt is not always incurred, then on

what ground does the distinction rest? Is it said, that in some cases a man is able to perceive the truth, and in other cases that he is not able? If unable to perceive the truth, or if from any cause the truth be not perceived, then ignorance and not knowledge, unbelief and not belief, should be his state of mind. Is it said, that he is constrained by force external to himself to think that what is true is erroneous? The supposition is inconsistent with the possession of intelligence. Is it said, that belief in what is false is sometimes invincible and involuntary? The assertion, as has been shewn, renders every belief doubtful and nugatory. There is only one consistent conclusion left for our adoption, namely, that in every instance abnormal knowledge and its corresponding belief, being voluntary *indirectly*, involves a responsible being in culpability and liability to punishment.

This conclusion, however, is not unattended with an apparent difficulty of the most formidable character. For it will be asked, how can any man living hope to escape from all erroneous sentiments! or how can men be regarded as culpable, who have done what they could to reach the truth!

It is not maintained that in the present state of human society every man who acts conscientiously will *immediately* attain exemption from erroneous judgments and self-inconsistency. But the cases in which this immediate exemption is not attainable, may be so specified and explained as to vindicate the correctness of the principle that has been announced.

The understanding of a child being, like his body, immature, his mind is dependent upon the instructions of his parents, as his body is sustained by their care. If the child did not believe, on the authority of those who are charged with his education, what he himself by his own intelligence does not and cannot know to be true, he would never grow up to be a man. There is accordingly in children a natural instinct or disposition suitable to their circumstances, which leads them to believe the word, or trust the authority of their parents, without questioning and without hesitation. If, then, human society be fallen and corrupt, as it undoubtedly is, young persons who are brought up among prevailing erroneous sentiments, and are legitimately bound while in their minority to accept their beliefs on the authority of their natural guardians, will be inevitably led, notwithstanding any efforts which they might make to the contrary, to adopt not a few erroneous principles. Having, in this manner, adopted false opinions, and having moreover often acted upon them, it is not to be expected that, do what they may, they will easily or quickly extricate themselves from the maze of error in which they have been trained.

Besides, when such individuals reach full maturity, even though they may be conscious of being involved in error, and be intensely anxious to escape from it, and to know the truth on every subject, they are not at liberty to dismiss all their beliefs and suspend all action, till they shall have calmly and at leisure examined every needful

topic for themselves, and adopted a ripened judgment. They are urged on irresistibly by the pressure of events, the eagerness of desire, and the calls of duty, to reason and decide and act, even while their minds are prepossessed and governed by prejudices and erroneous principles. Here, then, is a well-marked class of cases, whose features may be easily discriminated and recognised. We must, therefore, expect to meet with many individuals adopting and acting upon false principles, *from which no personal conscientiousness on their part could have saved them.* Neither must it be forgotten, that these false principles *were not conscientiously adopted,* but simply received on hereditary authority. The fact that the first reception of these prejudices was legitimate enough, and that afterwards no fair opportunity was afforded for revising and considering them on account of the urgent pressure of circumstances, may qualify the personal culpability of those who are thus situated, but it cannot alter the nature of error or of erroneous judgment.

Making every allowance, then, for such cases as the above, it still remains true, that every man is bound to avail himself of every proper opportunity to examine with all diligence and scrupulosity the accuracy of his beliefs. Moreover, it is only a *strong and practical necessity* which can in any degree excuse a man for holding, and acting upon, a hereditary belief, which he has not examined for himself and found on satisfactory grounds to be true. And more specifically it cannot be

denied, that when a man deliberately examines a question, and avows his opinion after due and professedly impartial consideration, maintaining that the belief which he has adopted is necessary to secure the welfare of himself and others, he cannot be mistaken in this belief without justly incurring censure.

It is no doubt proper to distinguish between those of our abnormal beliefs which are the result of our own personal derelictions, and those which are hereditary and may be traced entirely to our circumstances; but it is no less proper to notice their connection and agreement. It may be easily shewn that both kinds of abnormal belief imply *guilt*. Guilt is twofold; direct and indirect. Direct guilt is incurred by doing what we know at the time of doing it to be wrong. Indirect guilt is incurred by doing what we know or think at the time of doing it to be right, but which is in reality wrong. Erroneous or abnormal belief, therefore, is the distinguishing peculiarity of indirect guilt. To deny that abnormal belief involves guilt is to deny the guilt of infanticide, sutteeism, and a thousand abominations. To shift the guilt of abnormal belief from the creature is to cast it upon the Creator. Abnormal belief is culpable indirectly, not only because it leads, or may lead, to improper actions, but also because it is always the result of direct guilt.

We fully admit the distinction between the abnormal beliefs which may be traced to our own personal transgressions, and those which may be traced to the trans-

gressions of our forefathers. In practical life, however, it is not always easy to distinguish between them. Besides it is the duty of every man to endeavour to escape from both these sorts of erroneous judgments, and it is the ultimate destiny of every *honest* man to effect a full and final escape from them all. Moreover, while we are implicated in them, we find ourselves exposed to suffer the penalties of the one sort as well as of the other.

For it is an undoubted fact, that guilt or liability to punishment is found attaching itself to an erroneous judgment, over which the individual who holds it has had little or even no personal control at all, being strictly hereditary, as well as to one which is the unquestionable result of his own carelessness, apathy, or wilful prejudice. This fact involves the principle that among a race of beings constituted as men are, individuals may be seriously implicated in the guilt of their progenitors, independently of their own will and without their own consent. In this simple statement of the case as it actually exists in the world around us, we have a strong confirmation of our assertion that every abnormal belief is culpable. And though many attempts have been made to deny or soften the painful fact just alluded to, they have all been manifestly unsuccessful. And if it be indeed the case, that *every* erroneous judgment is culpable, and that men are justly held responsible for such, it follows that the most honest and effectual method for the Christian Church to refute Infidelity and Popery and to con-

vert the nations, is just to *do* herself what she exhorts others to do, “Buy the truth, and sell it not.” When she does so, her schisms will be healed, and the world, seeing her union, will believe that God has sent His Son.

THE END.

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